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CONSIDERATIONS

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1507/1320

ON THE

OVERTURE,

LYING BEFORE

THE ASSOCIATE SYNOD,

RESPECTING

Some Alterations in the FORMULA concerning the Power of the CIVIL MAGISTRATE in Matters of Religion;

AND

The Obligation of our COVENANTS, NATIONAL and SOLEMN LEAGUE on Posterity.

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"Majoribus noſtris eam debemus reverentiam, ut quæ tradita ab ipſis poſteritati ſint, ante non rejiciantur, quam diligenter et accuratè expenſa ſint: Quo tamen officio ſi quis probe defunctus ex certiſſimis nihilominus argumentis colligat eos erraſſe, tum exiſtimamus, viliſſimi ac ignobilis animi eſſe, vel in iiſdem cum ipſis pertinaciter perſeverare, vel eos quavis modo velle palliare." Vitr. Obſ. Sacræ.

[*In Engliſh.*]

"It is a piece of reſpect due to our anceſtors, not to reject their opinions, till we have accurately examined them. When we have done this, and have been convinced upon ſure grounds that they were miſtaken, it would, in our judgment, be a ſign of extreme meanneſs of ſpirit, either to retain, or ſo much as to palliate, their errors."

CONSIDERATIONS

RESPECTING

THE POWER OF THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE IN MATTERS OF RELIGION.

"WATCH and pray," ſays our Lord, "that ye "enter not into temptation." Never have we more need to watch and pray, than when we enter into diſputes of a religious kind. Nothing can be more diſhonourable to religion, and yet nothing is more common among its miniſters, than intemperate language in religious controverſies. Never let us forget, that "the "wrath of man worketh not the righteouſneſs of God;" and that "all our things ought to be done with cha-"rity," with that "charity which ſuffereth long, and is "kind, which envieth not, which vaunteth not itſelf, is "not puffed up, doth not behave itſelf unſeemly, ſeek-"eth not her own, is not eaſily provoked, thinketh no "evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the "truth, beareth" (or rather covereth) "all things, be-"lieveth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all "things." We muſt be valiant and zealous for the truth; but our zeal muſt be the bright and pure flame of charity. That zeal which is not joined with charity, which is not the flame of that holy fire, is a firebrand kindled by our own unhallowed paſſions. Of all the truths for which we ought earneſtly to contend, none is more certainly divine, none is of greater importance in

the Chriſtian life, none is more deeply imprinted in the heart of the true follower of Jeſus than this, that "we "ought to love one another even as Chriſt loved us," John xv. 12. Our corrupt paſſions too readily diſpoſe us to judge haſtily concerning our opponents. When we feel this operation, let us call to mind the Apoſtle's correction, "Let us not therefore judge one another any "more, but judge this rather, that no man put a ſtum-"bling-block, or an occaſion to fall, in his brother's "way."

It is no leſs neceſſary, in religious controverſies, to attend to the ſtate of the queſtion, in the whole management of the diſpute. The queſtion between Job and his three friends was, whether the ſingular afflictions of the good man proved him to be a great offender or not. His friends, forgetting all along the debate that this was the queſtion, ſhowed at great length that God is righteous, and that he "heaps up miſchiefs upon" tranſgreſſors. Well might Job ſay, "What doth your arguing "reprove? Who knoweth not ſuch things as theſe?" Job could "heap up words" as ſtrong, and in as great abundance, as any of them, to prove that ſinners ſhall not eſcape God's righteous judgment. But in a perfect conſiſtency with this great truth, he would "maintain "his own ways" before his friends, and before God himſelf.

The true ſtate of the queſtion between thoſe who urge and thoſe who oppoſe an alteration in the Formula of the Aſſociate Synod, is not, whether the Magiſtrate has any power in religious matters, or whether he has all that power which is aſcribed to him in our public ſtandards; but whether the doctrine concerning his power in religious matters, as it is aſſerted in them, be a matter of ſo great importance in our religion, that all miniſters and elders in the Seceſſion ſhould be required to profeſs their belief of it: Not, whether our national covenants bind the nation through every generation; but, whether none ſhould be admitted to miniſter among us in holy things, or to occupy a place in any ſeſſion, unleſs they can declare, in the preſence of God and the people, that the preſent generation is bound, not only to hold faſt the principles of religion ſworn to in our co-

venants, but to hold them faſt *on this very account, that they were ſworn to by our forefathers;* ſo that we muſt be guilty of perjury, as well as of apoſtacy, in conſequence of the oath of a former generation, unleſs we cleave to that profeſſion of religion, which the ſwearers of the covenants bound themſelves to maintain.

Perhaps ſome will ſay, that the difference between theſe two ſtates of the queſtion is little or nothing. If the doctrine of our ſubordinate ſtandards be right, why not bind all our miniſters and elders, by the ſtricteſt engagements, to hold it faſt? Are we not bound to contend earneſtly for every part of the truth which is revealed in Scripture? The ſame obſervation will be applied to the other point in queſtion. If our covenants have in reality a binding force upon us, not only becauſe the things ſworn were good in themſelves, but becauſe our fathers ſware them, ſo that their oath becomes our oath, why ſhould not intrants into the miniſtry and the elderſhip, be required to declare their belief of that obligation?

That we are bound to hold faſt the truth, is undeniable. We, no doubt, ought to make ourſelves acquainted with every precious truth contained in Scripture, as far as our abilities and opportunities extend. We ſhould endeavour to make others beſides ourſelves acquainted with thoſe truths of which they are ignorant, and to tranſmit them to poſterity. And it will not be denied that we are more eſpecially bound to maintain and tranſmit to poſterity, thoſe truths which we have learned from our venerable anceſtors, ſome of whom ſwore to maintain them, and others of whom ſealed them with their blood. Naboth would rather encounter the rage of an imperious king, governed by an infernal fury that lay in his boſom, than part with the inheritance of his fathers. But the truths handed down to us by our progenitors are of greater value, beyond all calculation, than the richeſt poſſeſſions, even in Canaan, the land of promiſe. Accurſed is the man before the Lord, who does not prefer the precious truths of God to his chief earthly joy.

But the queſtion is, *how* are we to maintain the truths of our religion? Many of theſe ought, no doubt, to be conſidered as articles of church-communion: and we

are bound to withdraw ourſelves from thoſe brethren who refuſe to concur with us in the profeſſion of them, 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5, 6. But there are other truths which certainly ought not to have place among our terms of communion, unleſs we wiſh to exclude from religious fellowſhip all who have not the ſame meaſure of underſtanding, or the ſame meaſure of pride, as ourſelves. Is it to be ſuppoſed that, in our preſent ſtate of blindneſs and weakneſs, either our brethren, or ourſelves, know every thing that is contained in Scripture, or know every thing to be certainly true, that we think we know. Are there not, in all religious parties, differences of judgment, about ſome points of religion, between members and miniſters of the ſame communion? When theſe differences take place, both may be in the wrong, but both cannot be in the right; and yet they can agree to differ without violating the bonds of charity or of church-communion.

Our Lord was in perſon the teacher of the firſt miniſters that appeared in the Chriſtian church. But did they underſtand every article of truth, before they were ſent forth to preach in the Holy Land, or even before they were ſent forth into all the world, to preach the goſpel to every creature? If this myſtery had been made a term of communion at that time, "That the Gentiles "ſhould be fellow-heirs, and of the ſame body, and par-"takers of God's promiſe in Chriſt, through the goſpel," which of the Apoſtles themſelves would have been entruſted with the glad tidings of ſalvation to men? And yet this doctrine had been taught, both by the ancient prophets, and by Chriſt himſelf: and it may even be fairly deduced from the apoſtolic commiſſion itſelf, Mat. xxviii. 19, 20. Mark xvi. 15, 16. After this time it "pleaſed God to make choice of Simeon firſt, by him "to viſit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for "his name." But Simeon himſelf needed a new revelation to explain to him the extent of his own commiſſion; and from the reflections made upon his conduct by the brethren at Jeruſalem, it appears that all of them had contracted and narrow views concerning the grace of God to the Gentiles. Did Peter ever imagine that they ought to be cenſured for this miſtaken notion? He

was happy to eſcape cenſure from them, although he was ſure that he was in the right, and that the point in queſtion was a matter of very great importance. It is true, that he ſoon brought them to a right mind, by informing them of his viſion at Joppa, and of his ſucceſs at Ceſarea. But if they had remained unconvinced by his argument, would he have thought that they ought, of courſe, to be expelled from the communion of the church, or depoſed, or ſuſpended from the exerciſe of thoſe offices which they held in it? By no means. He erred, at another time, in practice on this point; but it was by an exceſs of complaiſance to thoſe who had miſtaken notions concerning the liberty of converſe with the Gentiles. Paul at Antioch "withſtood Peter to "the face, becauſe he was to be blamed." Wherein was the great Apoſtle to be blamed? Not becauſe he held communion with the Jews, who would not hold communion with the Gentile Chriſtians, although they diſcovered a very miſtaken judgement about the liberty wherewith Chriſt had made his people free; but, becauſe he complied with them in their bigotry, and declined to eat with the Gentiles. It was his duty to hold faſt in profeſſion and practice, the great doctrine of Chriſtian liberty, in oppoſition to brethren of a contrary ſentiment; but it was not his duty to withdraw himſelf from theſe narrow-minded brethren. He could hold faſt, and promote the knowledge of this truth much better, by methods more adapted to the amiable genius of that religion which he had learned from his divine Maſter.

If the diſciples of Jeſus had not learned from him, during the attendance of ſome years, every truth of religion, is it to be ſuppoſed that candidates for the miniſtry will learn, in the courſe of a few years attendance upon the inſtructions of men like themſelves, every truth contained in the New Teſtament, and be ſo well eſtabliſhed in the belief of every truth, as to be qualified for entering into a ſacred vow that they will hold it faſt to the end of their lives?

The Apoſtles, it may be ſaid, were "not to depart "from Jeruſalem, till they were endued with power "from on high," by the effuſion of that Spirit who was

to teach them all things. True; but they were already ordained preachers and apoſtles, and "teachers of the "Gentiles in faith and verity." Nor did the Spirit teach them all things in one day, that they were to publiſh to the world. Peter learned much on the glorious Pentecoſt, and was the happy inſtrument of converting many of thoſe three thouſand who were that day added to the church; yet he had not well learned that leſſon till a conſiderable time afterwards, to call nothing common or unclean which God had ſanctified.

Apollos preached the goſpel at Epheſus; when he was inſtructed only in the baptiſm of John. He was not forbidden to do it by Paul or by any Chriſtian in that place. Priſcilla and Aquila heard him; and although they knew the way of the Lord much more perfectly than he did, they did not require nor requeſt him to deſiſt from preaching till he had obtained a larger meaſure of knowledge, and was qualified to give a judicious aſſent to all thoſe principles which they had learned from the Apoſtles. They ſaw that he was an eloquent and uſeful miniſter of Chriſt, when he knew only the baptiſm of John; and they took him to themſelves and taught him the way of the Lord more perfectly, that he might be ſtill more uſeful.

If we require from our fellow miniſters an abſolute conformity in all their ſentiments to ours, we claim to ourſelves greater power than the Apoſtle Paul. "I "know and am perſuaded," ſaid he, "of the Lord Jeſus "that there is nothing unclean of itſelf." Did he enjoin every man to be excommunicated, or depoſed from his office in the church, who was not perſuaded of the ſame truth? So far from this that he repreſents it as a preſumptuous wickedneſs to deſpiſe ſuch weak brethren. He takes it for granted that God had received them: and therefore enjoins their brethren to receive them to the glory of God. In another paſſage of his writings he exhorts the Chriſtians at Philippi to be of the ſame mind with himſelf, and to follow the example of religious zeal which he ſet them; but he would by no means have thoſe Chriſtians excluded from their place in the church, who were not in every thing like minded. "Let "us, as many as are perfect be thus minded, and if in

"any thing ye be otherwiſe minded, God ſhall reveal "even this unto you," Rom. xiv. Phil. iii.

It would be eaſy to ſhow, that it was never the ſentiment of men approved in Chriſt, that every religious doctrine ſhould be an article of communion amongſt Chriſtians. It was not the ſentiment of Polycarp, or of Ireneus, his friend, or of Luther or Calvin, the great reformers of the church. It was not the ſentiment of the great men of God who flouriſhed in Scotland in her beſt times. It was not the ſentiment of our fathers in the Seceſſion *. But perhaps it will be thought, that too much has been already ſaid on a point which common ſenſe might eaſily decide. To thoſe, if there be any ſuch, who will hold no Chriſtian or miniſterial communion, but with men of the ſame judgment in every point with themſelves, we may ſay, as Conſtantine did to a Novatian Biſhop at the Council of Nice, "Make a ladder, "and climb up to Heaven by yourſelves."

If any party of Chriſtians could, conſiſtently with their own profeſſions, require unreſtricted uniformity of ſentiments as the condition of church fellowſhip, it would be that large body of men who claim infallibility to their church. But even theſe men pretend not to uniformity in every religious ſentiment; nor will the Pope himſelf dare to impoſe all his own opinions upon his ſubjects. Pope Sextus IV. as we are told by Father Paul, was zealouſly attached to the immaculate conception of the Virgin, and gave public teſtimony of his opinion, by a bull, approving a Litany compoſed for her honour; but did not pretend to make it an article of communion. Paul III. ordered his legates at the Council of Trent, to guard againſt a deciſion on this point, when they compoſed their decree on the doctrine of original ſin. And it was well known how cautious the Roman pontiffs have been ſince that time, in giving deciſions on points diſputed in their church, leſt they ſhould diſſolve her unity. Why may not the children

* Mr Brown, in his Hiſtory of the Seceſſion, ſays, that the Burghers were perſuaded that men might have different views of the diſputed clauſe in the Burgeſs oath, or of other human, nay *many divine expreſſions*, without breaking up communion. Hiſt. of the Seceſſion, near the end.

of light learn ſome wiſdom from the children of this world, when we find our Lord commending the unjuſt ſteward? We blame the Pope for calling himſelf infallible, and ſome of us conſider this arrogant pretenſion, as a ſufficient evidence that he is "the man of ſin, who "ſits in the temple of God, ſhowing himſelf that he is "God," 2 Theſſ. ii. 4. But let us beware leſt we imitate him or go beyond him in his practice, whilſt in our profeſſions we reprobate his pride. "Every man," ſaid Luther, "has a Pope in his own boſom." What will it profit us to be freed from his tyranny, if we are Popes to one another?

That good old maxim certainly deſerves more attention than has been, for the moſt part, paid to it: "In "neceſſariis unitas: In non neceſſariis libertas: In omni-"bus charitas *." If we can bear no difference in ſentiment from our own, where is our charity and forbearance? Is it to be exerciſed only about errors in practice, and to have no place in errors of judgment? Which of us then can be admitted to church fellowſhip? Are we perfectly ſure that we are under no miſtakes in our judgments about any points in religion? Or are ſuch miſtakes in judgment as are conſiſtent with vital religion, ſo much worſe than the ſins of our daily practice, that we muſt be excommunicated for the former, whilſt the latter are univerſally tolerated, as the inſeparable attendants of erring humanity in the beſt men? It ſeems then that one kind of perfection is attainable in this life, whilſt we cannot but confeſs that we are far removed from another kind of perfection, not more diſtant from our preſent ſtate. Are there not remainders of blindneſs in our minds, of uncertainty and error in our judgments, as well as of corrupt affections in our hearts? "We know "but in part." "We ſee through a glaſs darkly." When we impoſe all our notions upon our neighbours, are we ſure that we will impoſe no errors upon them? Before we compel our brethren to ſwallow down all our opinions, let us make ourſelves ſure, that every one of them, without exception, is true.

* *i. e.* In neceſſary things let there be unity; in things not neceſſary liberty; in all things charity.

Perhaps it will be ſaid, to what purpoſe is all this waſte of words? Who of us believes himſelf infallible? Who of us does not take and give the liberty of differing from one another in ſentiments of leſs moment? Are we ſuch children in underſtanding as to make ourſelves oracles to all around us? Why aſcribe ſentiments to us which we diſavow and diſdain?

I would not wiſh to affix to any man's words interpretations which he diſavows, unleſs they be ſuch as he cannot diſavow without diſingenuity, or without abſurdity. And I by no means ſuppoſe that all who oppoſe the propoſed alterations in the Formula, inſiſt upon perfect uniformity in religious opinions, as terms of church fellowſhip. But I deſign the above reaſonings as an anſwer to the greater part of the arguments which I have heard or ſeen advanced againſt the propoſed alterations in the Formula. They turn upon this ſingle point, that the magiſtrate is really veſted by God with all that power which is attributed to him in our Confeſſion of Faith, and that the national covenants are binding upon poſterity to the lateſt age. Let us ſuppoſe theſe two points completely proved from Scripture. Will it follow of courſe, that no young man is to be admitted to the miniſtry, nor any perſon ordained to the elderſhip, who heſitates about declaring his firm aſſent to them before God and his people, and vowing that he will, to the end of his life, maintain theſe doctrines, as he will be anſwerable to Chriſt at his appearing and his kingdom? Muſt every miniſter be depoſed from his office, if he heſitates to concur in impoſing ſuch a vow upon intrants? It ought ſurely to be proved, not only that thoſe doctrines are true, but that they are of ſuch importance, as to be juſtly placed amongſt articles of our church communion. It could have been eaſily proved, that when Paul wrote his epiſtle to the Romans, no kind of wholeſome food was unclean, and that no obligation lay upon Chriſtians to eſteem one day above another. But the Apoſtle clearly ſhows, that theſe articles of truth were not to be uſed as engines for breaking the peace of the church, or interrupting the mutual fellowſhip of Chriſtians. When Job's friends had ſhewed that God frequently deſtroys the wicked by ſignal judgments, they thought that Job

ought to have ſtood corrected. But more than the half of the argument, or rather the whole of it, remained untouched. The queſtion was not, whether many wicked men had been afflicted with ſingular calamities, but whether none but wicked men were viſited with ſuch calamities. Thus, in the preſent caſe, the queſtion is by no means decided, when it is ſhowed that magiſtrates ought to ſuppreſs hereſies. It may be his duty to do it, and it may be at the ſame time the duty of church-courts to admit men to the miniſtry, or elderſhip, who have not ſufficient ſagacity to diſcern the force of the proofs by which this doctrine is eſtabliſhed.

I am, after mature deliberation, decidedly of the opinion, that the doctrine of our moſt excellent ſtandards concerning the power of the civil magiſtrate in religious matters, ought to be made a matter of forbearance in our church. I ſhall give my reaſons for it; but I ſhall firſt conſider ſuch reaſons as I have heard or ſeen advanced againſt it. My reaſon for taking this method of treating the ſubject is, that the objections againſt the alteration appear ſo ſtrong to many perſons whom I highly reſpect, that I am afraid, till the force of them upon their minds is weakened, they will ſcarcely allow any arguments on the oppoſite ſide of the queſtion, their due weight.

There are two requeſts which I make to my brethren and fellow Chriſtians who may take the trouble of reading my ſentiments on this ſubject.

Firſt, That before they proceed a ſentence further, they would read and conſider anew the paragraphs in our ſtandards which are the ſubjects of debate; particularly Confeſſion, chap. 20. ſect. 4. chap. 23. ſect. 3. Larg. Cat. queſt. 109. with our National Covenant, and Solemn League and Covenant, ſect. 2. Old Scots Cofeſſion, chap. 24. *

* 'And for their publiſhing of ſuch opinions or maintaining of ſuch practices as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Chriſtianity, whether concerning faith, worſhip or converſation; or to the power of godlineſs; or ſuch erroneous opinions or practices as, either in their own nature, or in the manner of publiſhing or maintaining them, are deſtructive to the external peace and order which Chriſt hath eſtabliſhed in the church; they

No man ought to conſider himſelf as a judge in this point till he has attentively examined them. Can any man judge in any cauſe, till he has fully heard it, and conſidered every thing that belongs to the merits of it?

Secondly, That they would duly conſider with what caution men ought to ſwear by the great name of God, and with what holy fear and reverence we ought to vow

may lawfully be called to account and be proceeded againſt by the cenſures of the Church, and by *the power of the civil magiſtrate*.' Conf. chap. 20. ſect. 4.

'The civil magiſtrate----hath authority, and it is his duty, *to take order*, that unity and peace be preſerved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blaſphemies and hereſies be ſuppreſſed, all corruptions and abuſes in worſhip and diſcipline prevented or reformed; and all the ordinances of God duly ſettled, adminiſtered and obſerved; for the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call Synods, to be preſent at them, and *to provide that whatſoever is tranſacted in them be according to the mind of God*.' Conf. chap. 23. ſect. 3.

'The ſins forbidden in the ſecond commandment are----tolerating a falſe religion.' Lar. Cat. queſt. 109.

'Likeas, &c.---Act 69. Parl. 6. of King James VI. declares, That there is no other face of Kirk, nor other face of religion, than was preſently at that time, by the favour of God, eſtabliſhed within this realm:---which by manifold acts of Parliament, all within this realm are bound to profeſs, to ſubſcribe the articles thereof, the Confeſſion of Faith, [namely the Old Scots Confeſſion], to recant all doctrine and errors repugnant to ANY of the ſaid articles, &c. &c. And all magiſtrates, ſheriffs, &c. on the one part, are ordained to ſearch, apprehend and puniſh all contraveners: for inſtance, act 5. Parl. 1. &c. &c. On the other part, in the 47th act, Parl. 3. King James VI. it is declared and ordained, that none ſhould be reputed as loyal and faithful ſubjects to our ſovereign Lord or his authority, but be puniſhable as rebellers and gainſayers of the ſame, who ſhall not give their confeſſion and make their profeſſion of the ſaid true religion.'---'Likeas &c.---That all Kings, &c.---ſhall maintain the true religion of Chriſt Jeſus, the preaching of his holy word, the due and right miniſtration of the ſacraments, now received and preached within this realm, (according to the Confeſſion of Faith immediately preceding) and ſhall aboliſh and gainſtand all falſe religion contrary to the ſame.----And they ſhall be careful to *root out of their empire* all hereſies and enemies to the true worſhip of God who ſhall be convicted by the true kirk of God of the foreſaid crimes,' &c.----To the ſame purpoſe other paſſages of the National Covenant, which are not quoted on account their length.

'That we ſhall in like manner, without reſpect of perſons, endeavour *the extirpation* of popery, prelacy,---ſuperſtition, hereſy, ſchiſm, profaneneſs, and *whatſoever* ſhall be found to be contrary to ſound

unto the Holy One, Eccleſ. v. 2,—6. Eccleſ. ix. 2. Conf. chap. xxii. 3, 4, 5.

The arguments which I have heard or ſeen uſed to prove, that theſe articles are not only truths, but neceſſary to be retained as articles of communion, are ſuch as theſe:

1. They have been already received, and therefore we ought to retain them.

2. The preſent miniſters in the Seceſſion are bound to adhere to them, by the vows which they have taken upon themſelves.

3. It is dangerous to recede from any part of our declared principles, leſt more eſſential articles ſhould be called in queſtion.

4. The reſpect we owe to our fathers of the Seceſſion and of the Church of Scotland, is violated by thoſe who alter any part of the ſyſtem of doctrine received by them.

5. Offences and breaches of church-fellowſhip will in all probability be the effect of the propoſed alteration, if it take place.

6. We forfeit the character of Seceders, if we depart from the religious articles in queſtion.

7. We will rouſe the jealouſy of the higher power, by dropping from our creed thoſe articles which recognize his power in religious matters.

Perhaps I have heard or ſeen other objections that cannot well be included in any of theſe; but I think that a ſatisfying anſwer to theſe will involve an anſwer to the ſubſtance of many others. To declamations which contain many plauſible words without argument, I do not pretend to anſwer. Of theſe there is no end. To conſiderate perſons they will anſwer themſelves; the inconſiderate will not read, or will not weigh what is ſaid.

doctrine, and the power of godlineſs,' &c. Solemn League and Covenant, ſect. 2.

'To Kingis, moreovcr Princes, Reullaris and Magiſtratis, we affirme, that chiefly and maiſt principally the reformatioun and purgation of religioun apperteanes; ſo that not onely they ar appoynted for civile policey, bot alſo for mantenance of the true religioun, and for ſuppreſſing of idolatrie and ſuperſtitioun *quhatſomever*,' &c.—Old Scots Confeſſion, ſworn to in all points in the National Covenant.

Firſt, It has been ſaid, that the articles in queſtion have been already received, and therefore ought to be retained; "for whereunto we have already attained we "ought to walk by the ſame rule, and to mind the ſame "things. We muſt hold that faſt which we have, that no "man take our crown; and having bought the truth, we "muſt by no means ſell it." Phil. iii. 16. Rev. iii. 11. Prov. xxiii. 23.

The duty of holding faſt the truth is indubitable; and it is no leſs evident, that we muſt withdraw ourſelves from all who do not concur with us in holding faſt thoſe truths which are vital in religion, or which are neceſſary to be held faſt for the good order of the church, and the regular obſervance of Chriſt's ordinances. A cool indifference about ſuch truths as theſe would be too plainly diſcovered by us, did we form and maintain religious connections with thoſe who deny them; for "from "ſuch" the Scripture enjoins us to "turn away."

But, undoubtedly, we are not bound, nor are we at liberty to hold faſt any truth of the Scripture in a way unauthoriſed by the Scripture itſelf, which is our rule in every thing that relates to church-adminiſtrations; for, "if a man alſo ſtrive for maſteries, yet is he not "crowned, except he ſtrive lawfully."

If the articles in queſtion are truths, we muſt continue to believe, and profeſs, and improve them. If they are truths which, according to the Scripture, ought to be maintained as articles of church-fellowſhip, they ought ſtill to be retained by our Formula. If they are truths, but not ſuch truths as ought to be made articles of church-fellowſhip, the time paſt of our lives is ſufficient for us to have kept them in a place where they ought not to ſtand. The queſtion then is this, not whether they ſtand in our ſubordinate ſtandards, but whether they *ought* to ſtand in them. It will, I think, admit of no debate, whether, if a wrong thing has been done, however ſmall the wrong, it ought, when it is diſcovered, to be redreſſed. I was ſurpriſed to read lately, a part of a ſpeech by a member of Parliament, in which he confeſſed that there was ſome degree of tyranny in certain exiſting laws, and at the ſame time, gave his judgment that they ought not to be altered. Allowing the articles

in queſtion to be truths, if they belong not to that claſs of truths which ought to be articles of church-communion, it muſt imply ſome degree, at leaſt, of tyranny, to exclude perſons from communion with us, who dare not ſwear that they believe them. Surely the duty of holding faſt what we have, does not oblige us to practiſe the leaſt degree of tyranny, whatever authority, or whatever cuſtom, may be pleaded in excuſe for it.

"We muſt not do evil, that good may come." Our damnation is juſt, if we ſay that we have any authority from the apoſtles, to do the leaſt evil poſſible, to ſerve the beſt purpoſes in the world. Now, it would undoubtedly be an evil thing, to make or to hold terms of communion, which Chriſt never appointed; and therefore, we muſt not hold the articles in queſtion as terms of communion, were it neceſſary to ſupport the moſt precious truths of the goſpel, unleſs we can find that Chriſt requires us to hold no fellowſhip with thoſe who differ from us in ſuch points. I do not at preſent ſay, that we want ſuch authority from Chriſt. All that I yet ſay is, that the argument under conſideration is no proof of ſuch authority.

Whereto we have already attained, no doubt we are to hold faſt. So the Apoſtle Paul enjoins us; and he certainly exemplified his precept in his own conduct. He held faſt in judgement and profeſſion this article of Chriſtian liberty, that men may eat any kind of food they pleaſe; but he did not hold it faſt as a term of communion. He would not withdraw from thoſe weak brethren, who could not believe, that Chriſt had ſet his people ſo entirely free from the law of carnal commandments, that nothing was unclean to thoſe that were pure. He greatly reſpected the weak conſciences of his Jewiſh brethren, and became to them as a Jew, that by all means he might ſave ſome of them.

"Nevertheleſs, whereto we have already attained, let "us walk by the ſame rule," ſays the Apoſtle; but he ſays alſo, in the ſame paſſage, "let as many of us as be "perfect, be thus minded; and if in any thing ye be o-"therwiſe minded, God ſhall reveal even this unto you. "Brethren, be ye followers of me, and mark them that "walk ſo, as ye have us for an enſample." The Apoſtle

certainly does not contradict, in one part of a paragraph, what he ſaid in another part of it. His precept therefore, concerning ſtedfaſtneſs in the things which we have attained, does by no means imply, that we muſt perſevere in holding articles of church-communion that ought never to have been articles of communion, although they may have been formerly held in this rank. What was wrong, cannot by habit be made right. Thoſe believers at Rome who deſpiſed their brethren, becauſe they had not juſt notions of Chriſtian liberty, were not authoriſed by their own miſcarriage to perſevere in it. They were ſtill to hold faſt the principle of Chriſtian liberty in its full extent; but they were to ſhow reſpect to their weak brethren, and to receive them to the glory of God.

Secondly, It has been ſaid, that the preſent miniſters in the Seceſſion are bound by their ordination-vows, to hold faſt the articles in queſtion.

Nothing can be more ſhocking than the profanation of the name of the Lord by raſh vows, or by infidelity to thoſe righteous vows which have been entered into before God; and, therefore, thoſe who have not yet taken the ordination-engagements upon them, ought to conſider maturely the matter of ſuch engagements, before they take them upon themſelves; and thoſe who have come under theſe engagements, ought to be well aſſured that they were wrong, before they renounce them, either directly or indirectly.

But, if men have vowed to maintain any part of doctrine as a divine truth, which they afterwards find, upon better information, to be no divine truth, they are bound, not to obſerve their vow, but to repent of their own raſhneſs. Otherwiſe, Luther muſt have been chargeable with perjury, in his oppoſition to the errors of the church, and to the power of the court of Rome. Our fathers, in the General Aſſembly 1638, muſt have erred, in declaring miniſters free from thoſe oaths which had been unlawfully impoſed upon them by biſhops at their ordination. David muſt have, by a parity of reaſon, incurred the guilt of perjury, when he ſuffered himſelf to be diſſuaded by Abigail, from executing a bloody vengeance upon the houſe of Nabal. But it certainly

requires little or no reaſoning to prove, that the vows of men cannot ſtand in oppoſition to the doctrines or laws of Chriſt.

It ought alſo to be obſerved, that no intrants into the miniſtry or elderſhip come under any vow to maintain every article in our Confeſſion of Faith, as a term of communion to be impoſed upon all ſucceeding intrants. To do this with a good conſcience, it would be neceſſary for all candidates to be well ſatisfied, not only of the divine authority of every point of doctrine contained in it, but of the divine authority by which every ſingle article ought to be made a term of communion. Conſidering the great number of articles contained in our Confeſſion of Faith, it is no eaſy matter, eſpecially for young men, to conſider them all with ſo cloſe attention, and to be ſo firmly eſtabliſhed in the belief of them as ſcriptural truths, as to declare before God their firm belief of them. But they would need, perhaps, more than a lifetime, to examine the importance of them, before they could conſcientiouſly promiſe never to hold communion with any miniſter or elder who does not believe all of them without exception. I ſee no reaſon, therefore, for the alarm that has been excited at the overture: for in departing from the things in diſpute *as terms of communion*, there is no relinquiſhing of principle; as we were never called on to ſay that they ought to be *terms*, but only that they are *truths*.

There is a ſenſe in which ſome think, that a declaration of aſſent to the whole doctrine of the Confeſſion of Faith may be warrantably given by thoſe who object to the article in queſtion. The Scripture frequently uſes expreſſions of univerſality in a limited ſenſe. Thus it is ſaid, Ezek. vii. 13. "The viſion is touching the whole multitude thereof, "which ſhall not return;" and yet we know that ſome did return, Ezra iii. 12. only the number of them that returned was ſo ſmall, that it was not worth the mention. Thus, it is alleged by ſome, that an exception or two to the whole doctrine of the Confeſſion of Faith need not hinder any man from declaring his aſſent to it with a good conſcience; becauſe, according to a very common idiom in language, which is followed by the ſacred writers, expreſſions are often to be underſtood with limitations, though not mentioned. But is it not far ſafer, in

ſolemn vows, to uſe expreſſions in their fulleſt meaning, and to leave no room for ſhifts, which would deſtroy the very end for which confeſſions of faith are deſigned. We are not ſo much to conſider in our diſcourſes, and eſpecially in our profeſſions of faith, what ſenſe may be put upon our words, as what ſenſe is moſt obvious and natural, and what ſenſe will naturally ſuggeſt itſelf to one who hears the vow pronounced. In matters of ſuch ſolemnity and importance, we cannot keep at too great a diſtance from every thing that has the remoteſt appearance of equivocation.

" It is a ſnare to the man who devoureth that which " is holy; and after vows to make enquiry," ſays Solomon; but he certainly does not mean, that men who have made ſinful vows ought not to retract them, or that they ought to impoſe them upon others, or that, if they have cauſe to ſuſpect an error, they ought not to make a free enquiry into the matter. If any prieſt of the church of Rome ſhould give us credible evidence that he ſincerely embraces the Proteſtant religion, would we think that he is unfaithful to his ſolemn engagements, becauſe he changes his religion; or would we think that he would deſerve to be blamed if he married a wife, in oppoſition to his vow of celibacy? Free enquiry into the mind of God, in every part of his word, is both our privilege and duty. No man can take this privilege from us; nor can we bereave ourſelves of it. No man can looſe us from this duty, nor can we releaſe ourſelves from it, unleſs we can exalt ourſelves above Chriſt, and raiſe our own vows above his inviolable laws.

Thirdly, It is alleged to be dangerous to recede from any part of our declared principles, leſt we ſet a precedent, which may endanger the moſt eſſential articles of our holy religion.

There are indeed two extremes to be equally avoided; inconſtancy, when we can give no good reaſon for change, and obſtinacy, when we can give no good reaſon for ſteadineſs. If, without the moſt ſolid reaſons, we make any change in our received articles of faith, we are like thoſe women, who were " ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." But

if we obſtinately adhere to any points of religion, and impoſe them upon others, without being able to give a good reaſon, from the word of God, why we ever received them, or made them terms of communion, we diſcover a greater regard to our own preconceived notions, than to the word of God.

Luther and Zuinglius were not terrified, by the danger of unſettling received principles, from calling in queſtion every article of the Roman faith, which they thought to be inconſiſtent with the word of God. If they had, where would our religion have been at preſent? Perhaps Luther was indeed afraid of departing too far from the received doctrine of the church, concerning the real preſence. What miſchiefs to the reformed church might have been obviated, if he had departed as far as his brethren of Switzerland, or at leaſt as his brother of Geneva, from the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation!

It is indeed plain, that the Reformation effected by theſe great men of God, excited a ſpirit of free enquiry, which was perverted by ſome to their own deſtruction. Errors, more pernicious than any of thoſe of the church of Rome, were adopted by not a few that left her communion. But what are thoſe good things that have not been perverted? Both civil and religious liberty have been often perverted to licentiouſneſs. But is ſlavery on that account to be choſen? Many have puſhed their free enquiries ſo far, as to excite alarms and ſuſpicions in well-meaning Chriſtians; and yet the uſe of free enquiry muſt always be favourable to the truth, and the prohibition of it muſt be favourable to error.

By all means let the lovers of truth take occaſion, from the overture in queſtion, to canvaſs and diſcuſs every article in our Confeſſion of Faith. Can truth fear the light? Or can that which fears the light be truth? Too little are the truths believed among us examined by thoſe who believe them. If they were more exactly enquired into, they would be better believed and improved. They are Roman Catholics, and not Proteſtants, who are enemies to free enquiry, and who wiſh to believe as their fathers believed, rather than what they can find in the holy Scriptures. I am not ſure whether I ſhould ſay they are Roman Catholics. Roman Catho-

lics in this country are now enquiring and judging for themſelves, about points that were formerly conſidered as unqueſtionable truths in their church. Let us promote ſuch a temper by our example. Error has much to fear from it; truth nothing.

Some, giving ſcope to the levity of their minds, in pretence of free enquiry, "will turn away their ears from "the truth, and will be turned unto fables." Let them follow the dictates of their own vain minds. "They "were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would "have no doubt continued with us. But there muſt be "hereſies, that thoſe which are approved may be made "manifeſt." Meantime, there muſt be free enquiry, that heretics and infidels may be reclaimed, and that thoſe who have received the truth may be grounded and ſettled, and may hold faſt the profeſſion of their faith without wavering. And it ſeems to me highly probable, that, for one who may be turned from the truth by free enquiry abuſed, twenty are likely to be turned from error, and twenty more eſtabliſhed in the faith. On the contrary, twenty are likely to be held in error, by the ſuppreſſion of free enquiry, for one that will be eſtabliſhed in the truth; if any man can be ſaid to be eſtabliſhed in it, who never impartially enquired, whether what he held was truth or falſehood. Indeed, thoſe men who hold faſt any truth without examining it, have but a looſe hold of it. They are likely to fall in the day of temptation; and if they ſhould never fall from their profeſſion, they muſt hold it faſt, on grounds fit only to be a ſupport to error. Let Heathens and Mahometans continue in their profeſſion, becauſe they have received it from their fathers; we will hold faſt our profeſſion, becauſe we have received it from Chriſt. We know that we have received it from him, becauſe we have examined it, and find it conformable to his word; and we entertain no ſuſpicion that any man who examines it by the word of Chriſt, will ſee any reaſon to find fault with it.

We muſt "contend earneſtly for the faith, and hold it "faſt to the end;" but, that we may hold it faſt, let us be careful to join nothing with it, that is either ſuſpicious or falſe. Truth ſuffers much by conjunction with error;

and therefore, thoſe who ſet a due value on the truth, will be careful to diſtinguiſh between truth and falſehood, between certainty and probability. What is it that has given occaſion to ſo many fierce and formidable attacks on the Chriſtian religion? What is it that has given occaſion to ſo much apoſtacy on the Continent, from the belief, and even from the profeſſion of the truth? The cloſe conjunction of error with truth in the profeſſion of the Church of Rome. Several articles of that profeſſion have been found wanting in the balance of common ſenſe. Several of them have been found abſurd. Several of them have been found inimical to liberty, and pernicious to civil ſociety; thoſe in particular, which give a certain claſs of men a right to tyrannize over other mens conſciences, by teaching them that it is their duty to ſuppreſs hereſy by the ſword of the civil magiſtrate. What is the conſequence of this diſcovery? The obnoxious points, having been formerly conſidered as parts of Chriſtianity, the Chriſtian religion itſelf has been by multitudes rejected, on grounds that might almoſt have juſtified the rejection, if Chriſtianity had really been what it was ſuppoſed to be. Falſehood joined with truth is like the dead fly in the box of apothecary's ointment. Suſpicious or unneceſſary articles in terms of church-communion are little better; becauſe they will appear in the light of miſtakes to many who are otherwiſe well diſpoſed to the truth, and will cauſe that ſyſtem of which they make a part, or with which they are joined, to be ſuſpected or abhorred. The Reformation from popery, by exciting free enquiry, has occaſioned ſome to fall from the profeſſion of the moſt important truths of religion; but it has provided us a ſufficient anſwer to the moſt ſpecious books written againſt Chriſtianity. Whilſt the philoſophic infidels of France upbraid their former teachers with the ſenſeleſs abſurdities and pernicious impoſtures of the Chriſtian religion, what have they to anſwer? They ought to lay their hands upon their mouths. But we can boldly tell them, that theſe abſurdities and impoſtures are no part of Chriſtianity. This advantage we enjoy, becauſe our fathers reſolved to think for themſelves, and to explode from their ſyſtems of Chriſtian religion thoſe ſenſeleſs or

pernicious additions to Chriſtianity, which will be like a mill-ſtone about the neck of the Romiſh doctrine, to ſink it down into perdition.

From what has been ſaid, it appears, that free enquiry about the articles of our communion, purſued to its proper conſequences, will turn none away from the truth, who have received it on ſolid grounds, and may probably diſpoſe many to ſearch the grounds of their profeſſion, who formerly diſregarded that important duty. But there is another thing that likewiſe deſerves conſideration. It is no leſs our duty to ſet an open door before thoſe who do not profeſs the truth, than to eſtabliſh in the faith thoſe who already join with us in the profeſſion of it. Now for this purpoſe it is neceſſary to lay no ſtumbling-blocks in the way of thoſe who are diſpoſed to aſſociate themſelves with us; or, if ſtumbling-blocks are already in their way, we are indiſpenſibly obliged to remove them. "Prepare you the way of the "people, caſt up, caſt up the highway, gather out the "ſtones, ſet up a ſtandard for the people." What if thouſands of ſinners ſhould be hindered from aſſociating themſelves with us in the profeſſion of the important truths of religion, becauſe we will not ſuffer them to do it, unleſs they will alſo profeſs their belief of ſome things that do not appear to them to be true, and that do not appear to ourſelves to be neceſſary? That the Jews might not be offended, the apoſtles required the Gentile Chriſtians to abſtain from blood, and from things ſtrangled. Although it was a certain truth, that nothing was unclean of itſelf, they thought it neceſſary, not only to bear with the believing Jews who were not like-minded, but even in ſome meaſure to gratify them. At the ſame time, that they might not drive away the Gentiles, who had already entered into the church, or exclude others that might wiſh to enter in, they would enjoin nothing to the Gentile Chriſtians, but thoſe things that appeared neceſſary to the Holy Ghoſt and to themſelves. If they had acted otherwiſe, they would not have approved themſelves the true followers of Him, who will not break the bruiſed reed, nor quench the ſmoking flax.

Fourthly, The reſpect we owe to our forefathers of the Seceſſion, or of the ſecond reformation-period of the Church of Scotland, has been alleged as a reaſon why we ſhould make no change in the articles of church-fellowſhip which they approved.

I ſee no reaſon why we ſhould be jealous for the reputation of our fathers, either of the Seceſſion, or of the ſecond reformation-period of the Church of Scotland. We need not be afraid that their names will want renown among thoſe who are acquainted with the hiſtory of their actions, whilſt eminence in piety, in prudence, in courage, in faith, is held in veneration. But what is that reſpect which we owe to them? Is it a blind deference to their judgment in every thing? Do we honour them by taking them for the lords of our faith? This would be to diſhonour them; becauſe it would be to condemn the principles on which they proceeded in all their bold contendings for the truth. They paid no implicit deference to the moſt eminent of the ancient fathers, and made acts inconſiſtent with thoſe of the moſt renowned ancient councils that ever enacted canons for the Chriſtians church. Did they yield an implicit deference to the judgment of the great reformer, Calvin, whoſe name was given to their profeſſion of religion? Did they not enact ſevere cenſures againſt perſons who did not religiouſly obſerve the Lord's day, although Calvin conſidered the ſtrict obſervance of it as little more than an human inſtitution? Did the Scotch General Aſſemblies implicitly receive the Confeſſion and Catechiſms of the Weſtminſter Aſſembly? By no means. They examined theſe compoſitions before they received them; and they received not the Confeſſion of Faith, without an exception. The Weſtminſter Aſſembly itſelf declared all ſynods and councils to be fallible; the members of it certainly did not mean to exclude themſelves from the number. To ſuppoſe that they did, would be to load them with a very heavy imputation, which they were far from deſerving.

What honour do the oppoſers of the overture claim for our fathers who adopted the Weſtminſter Confeſſion of Faith? They ſurely do not mean to claim for them the honour of infallibility. If they do not, how can

any man be charged with diſreſpect to them, for differing in ſomething from their judgment. The zeal which ſome well-meaning perſons diſcover for their honour, would almoſt induce me to compare them with thoſe frantic followers of Mahomet, who, upon the death of that falſe apoſtle, threatened to kill any man who ſhould ſay that their apoſtle, their interceſſor with God, was dead; but the ſagacious Abu Beker reduced them to reaſon, by theſe words: "Is it Mahomet," ſaid he, "or "the God of Mahomet, whom you worſhip? The God "of Mahomet liveth for ever; but Mahomet was but "a mortal like ourſelves, and, according to his own "prediction, he has experienced the common fate of "mortality." May we not, in like manner, ſay, On what foundation are we built? Not ſurely, on the foundation of our Scottiſh fathers, though they were eminent men of God, and the benefits we derive from their labours are beyond calculation; "but on the "foundation of the apoſtles and prophets, Jeſus Chriſt "himſelf being the chief corner ſtone."

It is ſaid of the beaſt, that "he opened his mouth in "blaſphemy, to blaſpheme them that dwell in heaven." By this blaſphemy of them that dwell in heaven, ſome underſtand the idolatrous worſhip given to departed ſaints and angels. But can exceſſive veneration be-called blaſphemy or evil ſpeaking? I believe at leaſt that theſe holy creatures are as much diſpleaſed with undue honours given to themſelves, as they would be with railing accuſations. Paul and Barnabas rent their clothes, when divine honours were given to them at Lyſtra; and ſurely if Paul and Barnabas were now on earth, after they have attained perfection in holineſs, they would be ſtill more diſpleaſed at the conduct of thoſe who join them in the office of mediation with their beloved Saviour. And would not our pious forefathers be equally diſpleaſed with their poſterity, who think it a ſufficient argument of the ſoundneſs of any doctrine, or the rectitude of any religious obſervance, that they were received by tradition from themſelves? Does not an argument of this kind proceed upon the ſuppoſition, that an implicit regard is due to their ſentiments? And, certainly, an implicit regard to the ſentiments of the

beſt and wiſeſt uninſpired men in the world, is an aſcription of that honour to men, which is due to God only. If it is not as real idolatry as the worſhip of ſaints, it is a ſin of the ſame nature, and of the like dangerous conſequence.

But who are the men againſt whom we are now diſputing? Who is it that pleads the above-mentioned argument as a deciſive one? No man of ſenſe and conſideration will do it. And yet there are many of the vulgar, who lay ſuch a ſtreſs upon it, or think and act ſo much under the influence of it, that it is neceſſary to ſet the weakneſs of it in a ſtrong light. It is indeed the only argument that you can hear from the mouths of many, whoſe zeal againſt the overture is very warm.

To ſuch perſons I ſay, that no man can revere the memory of our pious anceſtors more than I do, if he does not yield them a veneration which they never wiſhed to poſſeſs, and wiſh leſs in their preſent ſtate to poſſeſs, than whilſt they converſed with mortals. I admire their virtues, and the remembrance of them will be a powerful motive to urge me onward in my Chriſtian courſe, that I may be for ever with them where they are, and where their Lord is. But I will ſhew my reverence for their memory, not by a bigotted attachment to every one of their opinions, but by a conſtant adherence to the fundamental principle of their conduct, That the word of God is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify God, and enjoy him. Who are the men that ſhall dwell for ever with them in the holy hill of God? Thoſe who, like them, make the word of God, and not the opinions of men, not only the principal, but the only rule of their faith and practice, in all things that pertain to God.

Was Moſes deficient in his regard to his venerable anceſtors, becauſe he impartially relates the faults of Abraham, Iſaac, Jacob and Levi, and even of his own father? Did the writer of the books of Samuel diſcover any diſreſpect to David, by publiſhing to the world his faults and his crimes? Was Paul diſreſpectful in his behaviour to Peter, becauſe he found fault with him at Antioch, and recorded his reprehenſible behaviour in one of his epiſtles? It has, indeed, been often obſerved, that the

ſacred writers do great honour to themſelves, and even afford a preſumptive proof of their inſpiration, by the impartiality and candour of their narrations. Whilſt other writers diſcover their own paſſions or prejudices, by overcharging the virtuous or vicious characters of thoſe perſons whoſe actions they relate, the ſacred writers ſcruple not to expoſe the weakneſſes and faults of thoſe men, who were the glory of their families, their nation, or their religion. May it not be added to the above obſervations, that the candour of theſe writers does honour to the perſons whoſe lives they give us? They introduce us, by their impartiality, into ſuch an acquaintance with their heroes, that we love and venerate them, and give ſuch credit to every thing ſaid of them, as we could not eaſily do, if their characters were exhibited to us, ſo much exalted above what is ſeen in other men as abſolute perfection would make them. The character of Jeſus alone appears faultleſs, and abſolutely perfect; but even John and Paul are repreſented as men of like paſſions with us. In like manner, thoſe perſons give us the juſteſt ideas of our fathers, and do them the moſt honour, becauſe they will be beſt believed, who ſpeak of them as men liable to err, though eminent above moſt of the human race for every thing that deſerves the eſteem of Chriſtians or of men.

Read the books of Juſtin Martyr, of Chryſoſtom, of Auguſtine, and other fathers of the church. How many ſtrange miſtakes, how many abſurdities, will you find in them? And yet you cannot withhold a high degree of reverence from men ſo illuſtrious for their learning, their piety, their zeal for truth and holineſs. Even the Roman Catholic writers, who almoſt make their writings a rule of faith, acknowledge in their writings many miſtakes. I will not therefore ſay, that a blind deference for fathers is a character diſtinctive of Papiſts from Proteſtants; although it has been a diſpute between them, whether we ought to make the fathers judges in the controverſies of religion. A blind deference for fathers is the folly of bigots in either party; but by far leſs excuſable in Proteſtants than in Papiſts, becauſe it ſuits the profeſſion of the one, and contradicts the profeſſion of the other. If our fathers muſt regulate our judg-

ment about religion, let them not be our natural, but our religious fathers. What have Chriſtians to do with particular countries in chuſing their faith, unleſs ſome particular place has been appointed to be the metropolis of the church? Chryſoſtom, Auguſtine, the Gregories, Athanaſius, are much more ancient fathers of the church, than our Scottiſh fathers. Let us follow thoſe holy men in their opinions. They were great men of God in their days, and their praiſe is in all the churches; but the moſt bigotted of their admirers are forced to confeſs, that in ſome things they have erred.

We ought not to depart from the ſentiments which we have derived from our fathers, without ſerious and deliberate conſideration. Much deference is due to their judgment. To deſpiſe it would be a ſure ſign of unnatural vanity. But it would be a ſlaviſh meanneſs to follow their judgment, when we cannot ſee it to be well founded. Notwithſtanding of their ſuperiority to us in the nobleſt endowments, we may be right in ſome things wherein we differ from them; for "great men are not "always wiſe, neither do the aged always underſtand "judgment." But the probability, it may be ſaid, lies on the other ſide. Be it ſo. Is it not better to err with honeſty, than to forfeit our integrity by being in the right? Is it not infinitely leſs dangerous to tell a falſehood, which we believe to be a truth, than a truth which we believe to be a falſehood? The beſt and wiſeſt men are liable to err; but every righteous man hates and abhors lying.

After all, who are the men that follow our wiſe fathers in the trueſt and beſt ſenſe?---thoſe who adopt their ſentiments in every particular, excepting only in that fundamental point of judging for themſelves from the word of God; or thoſe who follow them in that and every other fundamental point of doctrine, but diſſent from them in one or two points leſs clearly revealed in the word of God? Let common ſenſe anſwer this queſtion.

Fifthly, It is alleged, that there is great danger of a new breach in the Aſſociate Synod, from the introduction of the overture.

The men who cauſe diviſions in the body of Chriſt, are peſtilences to the church and to the world, and ought to be expelled from every Chriſtian ſociety. But it appears plain to me, that the paſſing of the overture is neceſſary to prevent a breach; and that the danger of its producing one, is neither certain, nor highly probable.

Breaches in the church ordinarily proceed from ſelfiſh and malignant paſſions. I ſee not how any ſelfiſh paſſion would be much gratified, by a breach on the ground of the overture; and I believe that malignant paſſions are not to be found, to any conſiderable degree, in the breaſt of any miniſter in the Seceſſion towards another. Perhaps no body of miniſters in the Chriſtian church, equally numerous, ever poſſeſſed a more cordial regard to one another. Nothing I think but the power of conſcience, well or ill informed, would inſtigate them to ſeparate from one another.

But why ſhould conſcience compel any brother (if the overture ſhould paſs) to ſeparate from his brethren? The intended act of Synod does not require any man to diſavow any principle which he believes, or to deſiſt from endeavouring to ſupport and propagate it by any method conſiſtent with Chriſtian charity.

I believe that the overture paſſed into an act will be, when well conſidered, a relief to the conſciences, even of ſome who are not friends to it. I have heard ſome of them declare, that in their opinion, the Confeſſion of Faith uſes too ſtrong language concerning the power of the magiſtrate *circa ſacra*. How then can they, without ſome ſcruples of conſcience, require from intrants an unlimited profeſſion of adherence to the whole doctrine of the Confeſſion of Faith? Surely the men who fear an oath will wiſh that all ſuſpicious matters, and all ambiguous words, were thrown out of every vow which they may be called either to take or to adminiſter.

But, on the other ſide, if the overture do not paſs into an act, what muſt be the conſequence? Several brethren have declared their diſbelief, or their doubts, concerning the articles in queſtion. If they are not made matters of forbearance, they muſt be called to account

about their ſentiments, and compelled to renounce either their doubts or their charges. I ſee not what medium can be ſtruck. It ſurely will neither be permitted to them, nor choſen by them, to join in impoſing upon others thoſe vows with which they are diſſatisfied in their judgments. But before diſcipline can be exerciſed upon them, it is probable that their conſciences will compel them to renounce a communion, where terms of fellowſhip are required, which they cannot ſee to be agreeable to the word of God. Where terms of fellowſhip are impoſed, to which men cannot judiciouſly and conſcientiouſly agree, no choice is left. Separation in ſuch a caſe, however diſagreeable, muſt be a duty. Brethren on the other ſide are required neither to make, nor to impoſe any profeſſions contrary to the dictates of their own minds; and therefore no neceſſity is laid upon them to depart from the communion of their brethren. But, on the ſide of thoſe who diſapprove of any thing ſaid in our Confeſſion of Faith, it muſt be unavoidable.

Perhaps it will be ſaid, why did they not then ſooner depart from the communion of the Seceſſion body? This queſtion does not at preſent require an anſwer. Perhaps it may not be ſo eaſy to anſwer it, as to ſhew that now at leaſt they ought to be explicit in declaring their ſentiments on the conteſted points. They may excuſe or juſtify themſelves for not doing it ſooner, becauſe a ſtep of ſuch importance is not to be taken raſhly. But what would have excuſed or juſtified them before deliberation and diſcuſſion, will excuſe or juſtify them no longer.

Beſides the danger of a breach amongſt ourſelves, if the overture is not made an act, another thing deſerves conſideration: How many may be excluded from admiſſion into our body, or diſcouraged from ſeeking admiſſion into it, either by rejecting or by paſſing the overture? for, ſurely, it is incumbent upon us to leave the door of admiſſion into our ſociety as wide as a good conſcience will permit us. No man can deteſt more than I do, the hidden arts of diſhoneſty, by which ſome endeavour to make proſelytes to their own party. But, if we are ſatisfied in our judgments, that Seceſſion-principles are agreeable to the word of God, it is certainly incumbent upon us to

endeavour, by all fair and honourable methods, to gain aſſociates to our teſtimony. Do we not ſet an high value upon the truths which we profeſs? Why, then, ſhould we throw any ſtumbling-block in the way of our fellow-Chriſtians, to hinder them from making the ſame profeſſion? If Seceſſion-principles do not contribute to advance the glory of God and the ſalvation of men, they ought to be thrown aſide. But if they do, we are inexcuſable, if we are not ſolicitous to remove out of the way every obſtacle that may hinder our neighbours from becoming members of the ſame body with ourſelves.

As the principles of toleration are now almoſt univerſally approved, it is not to be ſuppoſed that many will decline our communion, for leaving out of our articles of communion every thing that ſavours of intolerance. But I am perſuaded, that great numbers that love Chriſt will ſcruple to connect themſelves with us; and many who are well qualified for the miniſtry will decline any connection with us, if the overture is not turned into an act. It might be dubious formerly; it will then be decided, that we are enemies to toleration of every kind, and that we conſider it as one of the great articles of Chriſtian doctrine, that not only Popery, Arianiſm, and Socinianiſm, but that Arminianiſm and Independency ought to be extirpated, not merely by the adminiſtration of diſcipline, and by the preaching of the word of God, but by the ſword of the civil magiſtrate; for it is plain, that Independency and Arminianiſm were ranked among thoſe hereſies and ſchiſms againſt which ſecular arms ought to be uſed. (See Brown's Church Hiſtory of Scotland.)

I am perſuaded, that not one of a thouſand will think, that Arminianiſm ought to be extirpated by ſecular arms out of our iſland, where, perhaps, a great majority of thoſe who profeſs a regard to religion, have adopted ſome Arminian errors. I am ſure, none who conſider what would be the conſequences of attempting it, would think of ſuch a thing without horror. How then can we expect, that thoſe who would look upon ſuch a meaſure with horror, ſhould conſcientiouſly accede to our communion, if we paſs a deciſion, in the name of Chriſt,

that it is the magiſtrate's right and his duty to ſuppreſs error; and not only paſs ſuch a deciſion, but declare it a fundamental article in our religion? This will certainly be done if the overture is rejected; and if it be done without good reaſon, we cannot free ourſelves from the guilt of laying, or leaving, ſtumbling-blocks in the way of thoſe who may wiſh to join with us in that good profeſſion which we are called to make before the world.

However lamentable diviſions are, there would be ſomething ſtill more to be lamented; the violation of our own conſciences to preſerve harmony. We muſt do no evil to prevent evil: But we certainly do a great evil, if we impoſe vows upon other men, without being fully ſatisfied in our own judgments of theſe two things; that they are in every reſpect lawful, and that we are warranted by the word of God to impoſe them. Rom. xiv. 23.

In the *ſixth* place, Are we true Seceders, if we thus forſake the principles, to which our fathers, at the beginning of the Seceſſion, diſcovered their zealous attachment?

When did our fathers of the Seceſſion diſcover a zealous attachment to the doctrine of the magiſtrate's power in matters of religion? Their act concerning the power of the civil magiſtrate, is a ſufficient evidence to me, that they did not believe the whole doctrine of the Confeſſion of Faith on that head; although they did not perceive that they had departed from it. There are expreſſions, too, in ſome of their ſermons, from which it may be fairly inferred, that in the opinion of at leaſt ſome of them, peaceable ſubjects, however different their religious ſentiments might be from thoſe that are publicly profeſſed, are entitled to the protection of the State. But I will not waſte time in anſwering this cavil. The firſt Seceders were not Papiſts, nor did they wiſh their followers to follow them implicitly. They judged for themſelves, according to the beſt of their ability, from the word of God, and were open to conviction when they had erred. We find Mr Ralph Erſkine, in his ſermon on John ii. 19. confeſſing, in the preſence of his brethren,

ſeveral miſtakes into which they had been ſuffered to fall. Why ſhould we be bound to think theſe men infallible, whom we would conſider as the moſt preſumptuous of mortals if they had thought themſelves infallible?

It is well known, that our fathers of the Burgher communion joined for ſome time with their brethren before the breach of the Aſſociate Synod, in ſwearing a bond framed for the renovation of our ſolemn covenants, but afterwards deſiſted from this practice. One of the reaſons aſſigned for it was, that the firſt ſentence in the bond of the covenant contained an approbation of that narrative of public defections which is given in the public acknowledgment of ſins. It was ſaid by them, that nothing ſhould come into a religious vow which depends for its credit upon human teſtimony. But if this argument was good for any thing, will it not prove, that they ought not to have made the obligation of our covenants the matter of a vow; for it is only human teſtimony which aſſures us that the covenants were ſworn by the nation. It will indeed be difficult to give any good reaſon for juſtifying the Burghers in diſcontinuing the ſwearing of the covenants, which will not be of equal force againſt continuing to require, under the ſolemnity of a vow, an approbation of the covenants ſworn by our fathers. What ſcruple ſhould hinder us from ſwearing the covenants, if we can declare upon oath, that we believe ourſelves to be always bound by them, as firmly as if we had ſworn them in our own perſons?

In the *ſeventh* place, Some ſay that we will rouſe the jealouſy of the higher power, by dropping from our creed thoſe articles which recognize his power in religious matters.

But the civil magiſtrate may rather be expected to thank us for doing it. If it be a truth that he ought to ſuppreſs all hereſies and ſchiſms, he is chargeable with a very criminal neglect of duty, in ſuffering ſo many Arians, Socinians, and diſſenters of all denominations, to enjoy liberty, property, and all the benefits of ſociety. Why does he not bring the wheel over thoſe wicked men, if he has not only a right to do it, but is bound by his office to do it? Would he not be highly worthy

of blame, if he ſuffered thieves and robbers and murderers to walk about unmoleſted, whilſt they are the bane of ſociety? But according to that doctrine which gives him a power to ſuppreſs hereſy and ſchiſm, as well as murder and theft, he muſt be more criminal for ſuffering the former than the latter ſort of crimes to paſs unpuniſhed, becauſe they are more prejudicial to ſociety.

It is to be obſerved beſides, that we do not take away, by paſſing the overture into an act, any part of that power which the ſtandards of our church give him. We ſay nothing about his power in religion. He will not ſurely be offended by our ſilence in this point. What magiſtrate, what tyrant, ever required all his ſubjects to make a public profeſſion upon oath of their belief concerning the full extent of his power!

Finally, it may be obſerved, that all the miniſters in the Seceſſion, every Lord's day, give the greateſt proofs that they can give of their loyalty to the ſupreme magiſtrate. They pray for the ſtability of his throne, and the proſperity of his government. Are they ſincere, or are they not, in their prayers? If any man ſays they are not, he declares them to be the moſt daring hypocrites in the world, who are not afraid to come before the Lord with a lie in their mouths in the preſence of all the people. Should they ſwear allegiance to government every week in the preſence of many hundred witneſſes, could they give a better proof of their loyalty? Would they diſcover themſelves to be greater villains or fools, if, in the preſence of ſuch a number of witneſſes, they ſhould give ſuch a teſtimony of their loyalty every week, and yet in private converſation betray a ſpirit of diſaffection to the government? He who entertains ſo low an opinion of our underſtanding and honeſty, deſerves no conſideration from us. Our governors will not certainly ſuſpect that we can be at once ſo weak and ſo wicked. If they did, they could not think themſelves ſecure againſt us, but by chains and bolts. Why then ſhould we be afraid of ſuſpicions againſt us, which can have no exiſtence? Have our rulers puniſhed any of thoſe authors, who have written books againſt all legal eſtabliſhments of religion? We do not go ſo far. We ſay nothing about the king's power in religion, when we

paſs an act to change the Formula, but we explicitly acknowledge his power in civil matters. This is all the power over us which he claims. When he claims over us that power in religious matters which our Confeſſion gives him, the point will become intereſting to us. We will then conſider it maturely, and we will allow the king's power in religious as well as civil matters, if our conſciences will give us leave. If they will not, we will go to Botany Bay, or to a gibbet, or a ſtake, rather than violate the dictates of our own minds. Let us fall into the hands of men, if we cannot avoid it, without wounding our own minds; but "it is a fearful thing to fall "into the hands of the living God."

It has been alleged, that no good reaſons have yet been ſhewed for the propoſed alteration. Having now conſidered the arguments againſt paſſing the overture of the Synod into an act, and produced ſome of the reaſons for which they appear to me inconcluſive, I will proceed to ſtate ſome of thoſe arguments which have determined my judgment on the other ſide of the queſtion. "Hear my words, O ye wiſe men, and give ear unto me, "ye that have knowledge, for the ear trieth words as "the mouth taſteth meats."

After all that has been ſaid, I chearfully confeſs, that unleſs ſufficient arguments can be given for alteration, no alteration ought to be made; and the maxim of the wiſe man may be, without violence, applied to the preſent ſubject: "Remove not the ancient land-mark "which thy fathers have ſet." Solomon, however, did not mean, that in no caſe an alteration of the ancient land-marks, either in the literal or figurative ſenſe, was allowable. If the ancient land-mark could be clearly proved to be ſet in a wrong place, it certainly ought to be removed. Our fathers were not, certainly, to be blamed for the alterations made by them in terms of church-fellowſhip, when they ſet aſide ſuch as were inconſiſtent with the word of God and Chriſtian liberty. None of us would think, that the rulers in the Church of England would be guilty of any crime, in removing the land-mark which their fathers ſet in the days of Queen Elizabeth. I do not mean to compare the

Church of England with the Church of Scotland, in point of purity or of defects. I mean only to ſhew with what neceſſary limitations an uſeful maxim ought to be underſtood, when it is applied to church-adminiſtrations.

But let us impartially conſider the reaſons that may be advanced for turning the overture into an act; and it is obvious, *firſt*, That if the Confeſſion of Faith gives the magiſtrate a power about ſacred things which the Scripture does not clearly warrant, neither the Confeſſion of Faith, nor Covenants, ought to have place in our articles of communion, without an exception of the article in queſtion. For I ſuppoſe it will not be denied by any Proteſtant, that all neceſſary points of religion are not only taught, but clearly and plainly taught in the Scripture. This is a doctrine maintained by all Proteſtant writers, in oppoſition to that of the Church of Rome. This is the doctrine of our excellent Confeſſion itſelf, chap. 1. 7. 9.

But are we clearly and plainly taught in the Scripture, that the civil magiſtrate hath authority, and it is his duty to take order, that errors and hereſies be ſuppreſſed, and that he hath power to provide, that *whatſoever is tranſacted in ſynods* be agreeable to the word of God?

Whether the civil magiſtrate ought to be a nurſing father to the church, is not the queſtion; nor, whether there ought to be a civil eſtabliſhment of the true and pure religion of Jeſus; nor, whether the magiſtrate ought to give liberal ſalaries to ſound preachers of the goſpel, whilſt his favours are withheld from all erroneous teachers? Nor is it the queſtion, whether erroneous perſons and ſchiſmatics are to be excluded from all places of power and truſt in the nation. The magiſtrate may be armed with authority to do all theſe things and a thouſand things more in favour of the truth, without having any power to ſuppreſs hereſies by civil puniſhments; and he may be armed with this terrible authority without having any power to provide, that what is tranſacted in ſynods be agreeable to the word of God. Suppoſing the magiſtrate to have the half of that power which is here given him; or ſuppoſe him to have nine

hundred and ninety-nine parts of a thouſand of this power, if he has not by the word of God the remaining thouſandth part of it, there muſt be a miſtake in this article, which ought to be rectified before it is made a term of communion.

Perhaps it may be ſaid by ſome, why apply the ſevere rules of criticiſm to the writings of our venerable fathers? why ſqueeze their expreſſions, and labour to find out exceptions of the minuteſt kind againſt them? I anſwer, that I do not ſqueeze their expreſſions. I do not even explain them. They do not need explanation. If they needed explanation, it would be eaſy to find one in our old Scotch Confeſſion, in thoſe acts of Parliament referred to in our national covenant, and in other public deeds of that age. But why not ſift, with anxious ſcrupuloſity, every ſentence in thoſe creeds which are the matter of a public vow? If there is a ſentence, or a part of a ſentence, in theſe which is not plainly founded in the word of God, that ſentence, or part of a ſentence, cannot conſcientiouſly be impoſed on any man in a ſolemn vow.

Several paſſages are produced from the Old Teſtament hiſtory of the kings of Iſrael and Judah, to prove the magiſtrate's power about matters of religion. But, as Chriſt declares, that "his kingdom is not from hence;" and as, "there being a change of the prieſthood, there "muſt be a change alſo of the law," it is a point of difficult deciſion, how far the approved conduct of Old Teſtament kings affords a juſt precedent to kings under the New Teſtament diſpenſation of religion. The apoſtle Paul draws an argument, from the ſupport of the prieſts, to the obligation of affording a decent ſubſiſtence to the miniſters of the New Teſtament; but will it follow from thence, that tithes, and firſt fruits, and portions of ſlain beaſts, are due to Chriſtian paſtors? The kings of David's family, as well as the prieſts of Aaron's family, were typical of our bleſſed Redeemer, and had ſpecial privileges belonging to them, and ſpecial duties incumbent on them, by the peculiarity of that diſpenſation of religion, under which they held their offices. I do not ſay, that Chriſtian kings have not the ſame rights, or are not bound by the ſame obligations as the

Jewiſh kings. What I ſay is, that it may be partly accounted a difficult point to determine, whether they have the ſame rights, or are bound by the ſame obligations? If ſo, then their example does not afford a *clear indiſputable* proof of the rights and duties in queſtion.

But ſuppoſing this point to be clearly determined, the proof of the article in queſtion is ſtill incomplete. Where is the evidence that the Old Teſtament kings were authoriſed or obliged to ſuppreſs what is meant in our Confeſſion of Faith by erroneous opinions and hereſies? Theſe are very different things from blaſphemies or idolatries. The Phariſees were zealous for the law; and their zeal for the law of the Sabbath, and the law againſt blaſphemy, was their pretence for ſeeking the deſtruction of our bleſſed Lord. But they might have, with much better appearance of reaſon, charged him with hereſy, than with blaſphemy, if they had ſuppoſed the crime of hereſy to come within the compaſs of the criminal code of Moſes. He was in reality, according to their principles, chargeable with hereſy, rather than blaſphemy, when he called himſelf the Son of God. But they impoſed the name of blaſphemy upon this pretended crime, that they might bring him, by this perverſion of language, under the penalties appointed to that atrocious crime. The Phariſees hated the Sadducees, who were certainly heretics in our ſenſe of the word, and condemned by the Phariſees for their heretical opinions; but they never ſeem to have dreamed, that the law appointed force to be uſed, for compelling them to change their opinions; nor, in the whole of the Jewiſh hiſtory, does it appear to me that ſecular arms were ever thought fit to be employed, for ſuppreſſing the errors of any of the Jewiſh ſects who were not found in the faith.

I do not ſee, that the approved example of the Perſian king, Artaxerxes, can be applied to the point in queſtion, however well it may deſerve imitation. May not kings have it in their power to puniſh Sabbath-breakers, or blaſphemers, or the breakers of any good laws made for the protection of the church and her aſſemblies, without having it in his power to ſuppreſs every erroneous opinion, and every corruption in worſhip, by ſe-

cular arms? Was it the King of Perſia's intention, that all falſe doctrine ſhould be ſuppreſſed in the land of Judea by his authority?

Herod's example is produced on this point. But who will ſay, that Herod's example (himſelf, perhaps, an hereſiarch) is of great value? Or who denies that any king may do, what Matthew tells us he did, to learn the place of the birth of the Meſſiah?

We are told, that God, who does nothing but what is righteous, will put it into the hearts of the kings of the earth to hate the whore, and to burn her fleſh with fire. But we are not told, that he will put it into their hearts to do it as a puniſhment for her erroneous opinions; and if we were, what then? Are we not told, that God has put it into their hearts, to agree, and to give their power for an hour unto the beaſt? Undoubtedly God does nothing but what is righteous; but it is as certain, that his agency is employed about the worſt actions, and that the Scripture employs as ſtrong expreſſions as that under conſideration, in many paſſages, to expreſs this agency. Rev. xvii. 17. Pſal. cv. 25. Acts iv. 27. Exod. vii. 3. 1 Sam. xvi. 14. Zech. xiii. 4.

Zech. xiii. 3. does not ſpeak of the puniſhment of heretics, but of the puniſhment of impoſtors. It is not a precept, but a prophecy; and are we ſure that it is to be literally underſtood, any more than the prophecy in chap. xiv. 12. 21.?

The text produced from Job xxxi. 28. is ſo uncertain in its meaning, that it cannot ſatisfactorily prove, that idolatry was puniſhed by the judges of Arabia in that age. Of hereſy it ſays nothing. One of the ableſt commentators on the book of Job does not even think that the paſſage ſpeaks of idolatry; and the Engliſh reader may eaſily ſee, that the words "to be puniſhed," are a ſupplement. Job and his friends were, in the eyes of one another, what we call heretics; but I ſuppoſe it did not ſtrike any of them, that their antagoniſts were to be puniſhed by the ſword.

I cannot underſtand the force of the argument, which ſome pretend to bring, from the authority of the Patriarchs in their own families. I do not find them puniſhing crimes more indubitable than many doctrinal errors.

I cannot, at preſent, conſider all the arguments that have been or may be produced in favour of the diſputed article. But I wiſh thoſe who reaſon in favour of it would remember one thing, that unleſs they prove *every thing* contained in it to be clearly founded in ſcripture, they prove nothing at all againſt the overture, or at leaſt, againſt the principle of it. Can any thing be more plain than that creeds ought to be purged of every thing that has the leaſt appearance of being unſupported by ſcripture? If they are not, we live in the habitual violation of a plain principle of church-fellowſhip, laid down, commented on, and ſtrongly eſtabliſhed by Paul, Rom. xiv.

The point in queſtion will appear ſtill more diſputable, if we conſider the plauſible things that may be ſaid on the other ſide of the queſtion.—Would it be conſiſtent with reaſon or ſcripture, with humanity or Chriſtian gentleneſs, to ſupplicate the King and Parliament to make laws for ſuppreſſing Arminianiſm, and other errors condemned by ſcripture. How would laws to this purpoſe operate if they were framed? would they not excite a civil war? might not the Roman Catholics rejoice, and ſay, "Are Proteſtants alſo become like unto us? They condemn with juſtice our forefathers for brandiſhing the ſword of the magiſtrate againſt men whom they called heretics. Our church is now the reformed church. Our wiſe eccleſiaſtical rulers have now ſeen the folly of attempting, by forcible means, to enlighten erring conſciences; and Proteſtants have adopted thoſe wild maxims which they have, for no good reaſons, relinquiſhed."

Why do not thoſe who think that this is the duty of magiſtrates, petition them to make uſe of their power for this purpoſe? might they not, at leaſt, excuſe their own conſciences, by this means, of the public guilt of connivance at hereſy?

Why do men of this way of thinking expreſs their gratitude to the civil powers for tolerating Seceders? Seceders, if not heretics, are at leaſt ſchiſmatics in the eyes of our civil rulers. Can it be laudable, or even lawful, to tolerate perſons who muſt be conſidered by them as ſchiſmatics, if the toleration of hereſy is in itſelf ſinful?

Is it a ſin to tolerate the Jews among us? Are they to be all baniſhed from the dominions of all Chriſtian princes, on pain of death, if they ſhould return? Yet the Jews are far worſe than heretics; and Chriſtianity never found more implacable enemies. I have often heard miniſters pray for the converſion of the Jews. I never heard, nor wiſh to hear a miniſter pray that it may be put into the hearts of princes to compel them, by civil penalties, to aſſume the Chriſtian name. When this is done, the inquiſition will be a very proper engine to enforce our laws. But is it not the will of God, plainly declared in his word and providence, that they ſhould be ſpared and protected, till the time come when all Iſrael ſhall be ſaved? Iſa. lxv. 8. Rom. xi.

I know it has been often ſaid, that we wrong the Confeſſion of Faith and the larger Catechiſm, when we allege, that the principle of toleration is condemned in them. Meanings conſiſtent with toleration have been forced upon the article in queſtion. But let any impartial perſon ſay, whether he thinks that theſe meanings are more obvious and rational, than that which I have conſidered as the true meaning. Let us even ſuppoſe that the meaning is doubtful; what concluſion muſt we draw? Are we to impoſe upon intrants articles of faith, expreſſed in words of doubtful meaning? I ſhould think this as unjuſtifiable, as it would be to harraſs thoſe who are weak in the faith, by doubtful diſputations. All books of human compoſition ought to be written with plainneſs of ſpeech; but above all, thoſe books which are to be the matter of a ſolemn vow. To what purpoſe do they ſerve, if they are not written in words, eaſy to be underſtood, and almoſt impoſſible to be miſunderſtood? To no other purpoſe, but to perplex and enſnare the conſciences of men. Far am I from ſaying, that our public ſtandards are not written with great plainneſs of ſpeech. I think the articles in queſtion are expreſſed with ſufficient plainneſs. But ſurely it will not be ſaid, that they are ſufficiently plain, by thoſe who think that there is nothing in them inconſiſtent with liberty of conſcience. It would, I think, be more honourable, becauſe it would be more candid, to allow that our venerable anceſtors had not clear views of the natural rights of men, than to attempt

ſo twiſt their words into a conſiſtency with thoſe notions of toleration that are now ſo common, and that were ſo rare an hundred and fifty years ago. Is it any diſreſpect to any ſet of man to ſay, that they were not entirely exempted from the prejudices of the age in which they lived? Were the Apoſtles themſelves entirely exempted from them, till the Spirit was ſent down upon them in a meaſure not to be now expected? Was David himſelf entirely exempted from the faults of his age? How then did he marry ſo many wives; or why did he not cauſe the feaſt of tabernacles to be obſerved in a manner agreeable to God's appointment? Neh. viii. 17.

It has been further alleged, that truth has rights to which error cannot pretend. This I will not deny; but what do practical maxims avail, if it is abſolutely certain that they muſt be ten times applied to ſerve bad purpoſes, for every ſingle time that they can be applied to good ones? We believe that the principles of the Seceſſion are agreeable to ſcripture. Were any of us placed on a throne, we would apply this principle, perhaps, to juſtify ourſelves in ſuppreſſing every thing that Seceders account hereſy or ſchiſm. But will not all ſovereigns avail themſelves of the ſame maxim, with the ſame degree of confidence, to ſuppreſs every thing inconſiſtent with their own views of religion? Can we tell them that they have not the ſame right that we have to uſe ſecular arms, for ſuppreſſing what appears to them to be hereſy and ſchiſm? They would, no doubt, aſk us what proofs we can give of our infallibility, and of our authority to pronounce, againſt all the world, what is, and what is not, hereſy and ſchiſm. They would compel us, were we under their juriſdiction, to renounce our ſentiments, or to deſiſt at leaſt from teaching them. Baniſhment, impriſonment or confiſcation of goods, would be the weapons they would uſe. In vain would we remonſtrate to them that their weapons are not ſuch as Paul uſed to caſt down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itſelf againſt the knowledge of God. Their anſwer would be ready, "Out of your own mouths we will judge you. We allow you to be right in ſaying that magiſtrates have a right, and it is their duty, to ſuppreſs hereſy and ſchiſm; only we will not be executioners to you. We claim a

right to judge for ourſelves, what is hereſy and ſchiſm. We may err, but ſo may you. In acting according to our own conſciences, we may be right; we cannot be ſo far wrong, as in acting againſt them, if we ſhould have the complaiſance, or the meanneſs, to ſubmit our judgment to yours. Sins againſt the dictates of our judgment muſt ſurely be more dangerous to our peace and ſalvation than ſins of ignorance."

Till the major part of kings and rulers are endowed with the ſpirit of a ſound mind, the maxim in queſtion muſt, in practice, prove more adverſe than favourable to the truth. I might ſay more, if the preſent part of the argument admitted of it. I might roundly allege, that in moſt, if not in all caſes, it muſt be adverſe to the truth. The ſpiritual weapons employed by Popes to ſerve ſecular purpoſes, were perhaps not leſs unfitly uſed than ſecular weapons for promoting the truth. This heavenly plant always flouriſhed beſt, when it was nouriſhed, not by the blood of heretics, but with the dew of heaven.

Secondly, I cannot ſee that the article in queſtion is to us of ſuch importance, as to juſtify us in making it a term of communion.

The operation of a term of communion is obvious. None muſt be admitted to the miniſtry among us, however well qualified in every other reſpect, if they cannot comply with all our terms of communion. Such as already miniſter amongſt us in holy things muſt be expelled from our ſociety, if they cannot, upon a ſecond conſideration, ſee that it is their duty to hold faſt to the end all the articles of our communion, and to concur in impoſing them all upon every candidate who wiſhes to take part with us in our miniſtry as office-bearers in the church.

But is the doctrine of the magiſtrate's right and obligation to ſuppreſs hereſy, of ſuch importance as to juſtify us in excluding or in expelling from the office of miniſters or elders, all who cannot cheerfully promiſe before God, that they will hold it faſt to the end, and never prove lukewarm or indifferent about it?

It is no doubt, a point of great importance to magiſtrates; and it will be a point of great importance to us,

when magiſtrates chuſe us to be the directors of their conſciences. In the mean time, civil magiſtrates will act according to their own judgments, or their caprice, or what they take to be their intereſts, without aſking our advice. It muſt therefore be a matter of almoſt mere ſpeculation to us. It makes none of the links in our chain of goſpel-truths. It gives us little direction about any part of our duty; unleſs we reckon it incumbent on us to admoniſh the national legiſlators, by petition or otherwiſe, of what we apprehend to be their duty reſpecting matters of religion. But ſhould we give them much trouble on this ſubject, they might poſſibly treat us as Phalaris treated the inventor of his brazen bull; and in that caſe, we could expect, and perhaps we might deſerve, as little pity from the world as that ingenious artiſt of miſchief.

Will it be ſaid, that the belief of this article of doctrine is neceſſary for the direction of our prayers concerning the civil magiſtrate? But I ſuppoſe that brethren on both ſides of the queſtion are perfectly agreed in this part of their duty. We all pray, that the throne of our king may be eſtabliſhed in mercy, and ſurrounded with faithful counſellors. I have heard none of our brethren pray, that the kings of the earth may be diſpoſed to ſuppreſs all hereſies and ſchiſms, and to take order that all the deciſions of church-courts may be agreeable to the word of God.

We find that our Lord ſometimes declined, and ſometimes expreſsly prohibited his diſciples to publiſh ſome of the moſt important doctrines of religion. For this, as for every other part of his conduct, he had important reaſons. He would not declare himſelf to be the Chriſt, the Son of God, nor ſuffer his Apoſtles to declare that he was the Chriſt, when he ſaw that the ignorance of men concerning the true character of the Chriſt might tempt them to abuſe the doctrine, by endeavouring to force upon him a kind of royalty unworthy of his dignity and inconſiſtent with his ſtate of humiliation. This danger ceaſed to exiſt, when his mortal life was at an end; and then men every where were required to believe in him as the Chriſt the Saviour of the world. Let us ſuppoſe the doctrine concerning the power of the civil

magiſtrate, as it is defined in our Confeſſion of Faith, to be inconteſtible; it appears to be a doctrine not neceſſary nor uſeful in the preſent ſtate of the world, when there is ſcarcely a prince on earth who will not either reckon the true religion a falſe one, or account ſome of its important doctrines heretical, and the boldeſt aſſertors of them ſchiſmatics. Let the princes of the world be enlightened to ſee their miſtakes; and then you may with leſs danger call upon them to uſe the ſword with which they are entruſted for the ſuppreſſion of hereſy and ſchiſm. Till that be done, let us not bite and devour one another, or load one another's conſciences with impoſitions in favour of a power which is not likely to be uſed in moſt places for the advantage of religion, and which may more probably be uſed for our deſtruction than for our comfort.

The millennial period of the church, ſo long expected, will come in the days of our poſterity. Till that time, let us make the power of the magiſtrate a matter of forbearance. When it is come, there will be, we hope, little occaſion for the exerciſe of it. The goſpel will then effect, by the Holy Ghoſt ſent down from heaven, what the ſword of the magiſtrate could never have effected, and what indeed, after all our diſputes, it never will effect. Many rulers have indeed uſed or abuſed their power, for the ſuppreſſion of what appeared to them to be error. But who were the rulers that have ſeriouſly endeavoured to ſuppreſs every thing which we juſtly eſteem to be hereſy and ſchiſm? or what was their ſucceſs? Has the doctrine of the magiſtrate's power againſt errors, when carried into effect, done moſt good or harm in the world? or is it likely to do moſt good or harm in any following age, before the time come when all the kingdoms of the world are to become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Chriſt?

Thirdly, The Synod has already declared their ſentiments againſt the articles in queſtion, conſidered as an article of communion.

It is well known, that in the act of the Aſſociate Preſbytery concerning civil government, there are ſentiments which cannot be eaſily reconciled, if they can

be reconciled at all, with the magiſtrate's power *circa ſacra*. No power is there allowed him, but ſuch as the law of nature gives him *.

In our Teſtimony, we diſapprove of civil pains and penalties for enforcing our ſolemn covenants †.

In our Warning againſt Popery, we openly declare our ſentiment, that every religious ſect is entitled to the protection of the civil magiſtrate, whoſe principles do not militate againſt the peace and good order of ſociety ‡.

It ſeems to me abſolutely impoſſible to reconcile ſuch ſentiments as theſe, with the obligation of the civil magiſtrate to ſuppreſs hereſies. For our own credit, and for the honour of our holy religion, let us take away all occaſion from thoſe who would be glad of opportunities to ſay, that our profeſſions are like the legs of the lame. "Let us make ſtraight paths for our feet, leſt that which "is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be "healed."

A reſpectable member of our body, now with God, publiſhed to the world his judgment, that what was ſaid in our Confeſſion of Faith, reſpecting the power of the civil magiſtrate, was a deſcription of the power of the Jewiſh, rather than the Chriſtian magiſtrate ‖. Another reſpectable miniſter yet alive, treats an antagoniſt with great ſeverity for his intolerant principles, and plainly confeſſes his inability to ſay, how far toleration is, or is not juſtifiable and neceſſary §. Another who is

* Page 71, edit. 1744. † Re-exhibition, pages 90, 91.

‡ Warning againſt Popery, pages 62, 63.

‖ Hall's Goſpel-worſhip, vol. ii. pages 390,—402.

§ Mr Thompſon (of Kirkintilloch) in his ſecond pamphlet againſt the Cameronians, entitled, The Preſbyterian Covenanter defended, writes thus: "Theſe are their ſentiments; 1. All toleration is ſinful; 2. All toleration flows from Eraſtianiſm; 3. Toleration is equally criminal with perſecution, *&c.* All which particulars are extravagant and falſe. There certainly are ſinful extremes in toleration; but was there ever a Chriſtian ſtate which allowed no degree of toleration?" *&c.* page 75. Why was not Mr Thompſon called to account for ſuch expreſſions, if the toleration of falſe religion is a principle abſolutely condemned in our articles of religion? He ſays elſewhere, page 73. "I own that I am not able preciſely to determine, what kind or degree of toleration is lawful, and what ſinful; though I am certain that on each hand it is liable to ſinful

highly eſteemed amongſt us, repels with ſcorn, from the Seceders, a charge of compulſory principles in matters of religion brought againſt them *. Why were not theſe brethren called to account for departing from our received principles; if young men at their entrance into the miniſtry muſt be required to aſſert their determined belief of the doctrine, that heretics ought to be proſecuted by the civil magiſtrate, and that the toleration of falſe religion is condemned in the ſecond commandment? Theſe principles undoubtedly ought uniformly to be held either as terms of communion, or as articles of forbearance.

The truth of the matter ſeems to be this: The greater part of us deteſt compulſion in matters of religion, and have been extremely unwilling to believe, that there is any thing in our venerable ſtandards which gives the leaſt countenance to it. Perhaps we have too obſtinately ſhut our eyes to the light, from an exceſs of veneration for our fathers, or an unwillingneſs to cut ourſelves off from that body with which we are connected, and from every body of Preſbyterians in the kingdom. Many paragraphs in books, and even a whole book, has been publiſhed to ſhew, that the articles in queſtion contain nothing inconſiſtent with the unalienable rights of men to judge for themſelves in matters of conſcience; but the attempt is fruitleſs. This at leaſt is certain, that the reſult of conſideration, in many of the brethren, has been a fixed conviction, that compulſory principles are contained in them, and that it would be inconſiſtent with integrity in themſelves, any more to require that unlimited profeſſion of adherence to them, which has been hitherto given, for the moſt part without ſcruple.

extremes, and that the line of duty between them is ſo vaſtly narrow, that I queſtion if any Chriſtian ſtate ever kept it exactly." What ſort of an article of communion is this which is ſo obſcurely revealed? And with what grace can any man inſiſt for impoſing on others as a trem of communion, doctrines concerning the magiſtrate's power in religion, of the truth of ſome of which he acknowledges himſelf ignorant, and others of which it is evident he diſbelieves?

* Walker's Animad. page 148,---151.

Theſe brethren may be miſtaken in the meaning they affix to the words of our ſtandard; but till their miſtake can be removed, they cannot give their countenance to the impoſition of the accuſtomed vow upon their younger brethren; nor can they continue to profeſs an unqualified adherence to the Confeſſion of Faith and covenants, without violating the dictates of their own mind. "He "that doubteth is damned if he eat," ſays the Apoſtle; and muſt not he that doubteth be damned if he vow? The words of the Apoſtle now mentioned, give a reaſon why Chriſtians ought not to impoſe their own ſentiments and practice upon their brethren in matters of doubtful diſputation.

Fourthly, Thec onſequences of paſſing the act propoſed, or of refuſing to paſs it, ſuggeſt an argument for the propoſed alteration; for the power which Chriſt hath given to his ſervants, is for edification, and not for deſtruction. All things muſt be done by us for the edification of the church, for promoting her peace, liberty and welfare. Nothing, without abſolute neceſſity, is to be done, that may expel uſeful members from the body, or ſhut the door sagainſt uſeful members that may enter in.

But it is greatly to be feared, that both theſe evil conſequences will follow the rejection of the overture.

Principles of liberty, religious and civil, are now univerſally current amongſt us. Books on theſe ſubjects, fall into the hands of all our young men in the courſe of their ſtudies; by which they are taught, that no man has a right to impoſe his own religion upon other men. The arguments are at leaſt plauſible and inſinuating, if not ſolid. The doctrine fixes itſelf on their minds, and without doing violence to their own judgments, they will not give their profeſſion of aſſent to the doctrine, that men who err in their religious opinions are to be proceeded againſt by the ſword of the civil magiſtrate. Can you keep ſuch books out of the hands of our young men; or would you wiſh to do it? Can you hinder them from adopting notions ſo plauſible, ſo congenial to the love of liberty? Will you exclude all that have imbibed ſuch notions from the Chriſtian miniſtry; however

well they may be qualified for it in every other reſpect, or however clearly they may be called to it by Chriſt? Then, I believe, you will exclude nine out of ten of thoſe who wiſh to take part in this miniſtry; unleſs they can find ſome ſhifts for reconciling their conſciences to what they do not heartily approve. You will admit thoſe who can bend their conſciences into a compliance with what appears convenience or neceſſity; but you exclude thoſe who are too honeſt to ſwear any thing which they cannot ſwear without clear convictions of duty. I am perſuaded that Chriſt admitted his Apoſtles, and many others, to the miniſtry, before their judgments were cleared from miſtakes of far greater importance.

We have already more demands for preachers than we can anſwer. If young men are bound to declare at their licence or ordination, that they believe what is ſaid in the Confeſſion of Faith, concerning the magiſtrate's power in religion, I am afraid we will ſoon have fewer young men, if any at all, to preach the goſpel to periſhing ſinners. If we lay, or if we leave, needleſs obſtructions in the way of young men, we are accountable before God for the miſchief that may be the conſequence. For a world, I would not be the guilty cauſe of withholding bread from one man ready to periſh with hunger; for ten worlds, I would not be the cauſe of withholding the bread of life from thouſands of periſhing ſouls.

It is poſſible, that ſome young men, doubtful in their judgments of the magiſtrate's right to ſuppreſs error, may be induced to make the uſual profeſſion of faith, under the perſuaſion that the point in queſtion is not a matter of great importance, and that, for ſo ſmall a matter, it is not their duty to deprive themſelves of opportunities of public uſefulneſs. But if their ſentiments are known, will they be ſuffered to make the uſual profeſſion; or can they be ſuffered to do it, while that maxim ſtands recorded in ſcripture, that evil muſt not be done that good may come? or can it be expected that ſuch young men ſhould come into the miniſtry with divine approbation, and with the fulneſs of the bleſſing of the goſpel of Chriſt? I have read of a certain miniſter, in the days of Proteſtant perſecution, who declared his judgment in ſtrong terms for a time againſt conformity, and yet after-

wards ſubſcribed to the articles required from him, giving this reaſon to his former friends for his conduct, that his deſire of uſefulneſs had conſtrained him to ſuppreſs his ſcruples; but God laid his hand upon him in ſuch a manner, that he ſeldom or never had it afterwards in his power to preach the goſpel. Strict integrity is certainly much more deſirable in a brother, than an entire agreement with us in all our opinions, and much more likely to be attended with the bleſſing of heaven.

But the caſe of brethren already in miniſterial communion with us, preſſes itſelf ſtill more immediately on our attention. Some, perhaps many of them, diſbelieve what is ſaid in our Confeſſion concerning the eccleſiaſtical power of the magiſtrate. Others of them entertain doubts about it, and cannot now continue to profeſs their reſolution to maintain without lukewarmneſs the diſputed article, as they will be anſwerable to our Lord Jeſus Chriſt at his appearance and his kingdom. They love their principles, and their brethren. They would rather ſuffer their right eyes to be plucked out, than ſeparate themſelves from their brethren, with whom they have ſo often taken ſweet counſel, or raiſe new commotions in the church of Chriſt, which they prefer to their chief joy. But a neceſſity is laid upon them, from their deſire of being approved of Chriſt at his appearance, honeſtly to declare their ſentiments, let the conſequence be what it will. When they declare their ſentiments you muſt expel them from your body. This is unavoidable, if the articles in queſtion are not to be made matters of forbearance. And for what do you expel them? for being of the ſame principles with yourſelves. For you have already declared, even as a Court, your diſavowal of compulſory meaſures in religion. At beſt, if you diſavow ſuch meaſures, you expel them from your body, becauſe they do not underſtand the words in the Confeſſion of Faith in the ſame ſenſe with yourſelves. We greatly blame our Antiburgher brethren, becauſe they excommunicated our fathers for underſtanding the burgeſs-oath of ſome towns in a different ſenſe from themſelves, and on that account, thinking it might be lawfully ſworn; when they thought it could not be lawfully ſworn, becauſe they underſtood it in a different ſenſe; a ſenſe in which

their brethren alſo conſidered it as unlawful. "Doting "about queſtions and ſtrifes of words," is, in ſtrong language, reprobated by the Apoſtle; yet ſurely there cannot be a more lamentable example of this conduct, than to occaſion a breach in our communion, by zeal for words which mens wiſdom has deviſed, when there is no difference about the doctrine expreſſed by them.

This argument will not, I confeſs, apply to thoſe who believe that compulſory meaſures are taught in our Confeſſion, and that they are taught on good grounds. But ſuch brethren need forbearance. It has been ſhewed that our body has publicly condemned ſuch meaſures. Let them not deny to their brethren that forbearance which themſelves need.

Will it be ſaid, that if there ſhould be a ſeparation of communion, it is owing to the unſteadineſs, or the needleſs ſcrupulofity, of thoſe who affix a ſenſe to the diſputed article which others cannot ſee to be the true ſenſe. Let them, then, be enlightened, not by violence, but in the ſpirit of meekneſs. If the overture is rejected before they are enlightened, I do not ſee how they can avoid a public declaration of their preſent judgment; or how, in that caſe, they can be ſuffered to continue in the body. They love their brethren well; but they love Chriſt above their brethren, and muſt be faithful to him who requires from them ſincerity in all their adminiſtrations. They tremble at the thought of diviſions in the body; but they tremble ſtill more at the thought of being found at the tribunal of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, chargeable with the guilt of prevarication; and can they be blamed? The famous Mr Whiſton, I recollect, happening to tell the Lord Chancellor of England, that he could not accept of a place in the church, becauſe his conſcience would not ſuffer him to ſubſcribe all her articles, the Chancellor replied, that he thought he ſhould not ſuffer ſuch ſcruples to obſtruct his uſefulneſs. But, ſaid Mr Whiſton, ſuppoſe any man ſhould be convicted before your Lordſhip of ſwearing what he does not believe to be true, what treatment might he expect from you? I would certainly puniſh him, ſaid the Chancellor, with ſeverity. And ſuppoſe, ſaid Mr Whiſton, that God Almighty ſhould happen, in the next world, to be as juſt as

your Lordſhip is in this, what will become of thoſe who ſwear what they do not believe?

In the language of ſcripture, thoſe who do what they can to deprive their neighbours of the means of life, or of the means of living with comfort, are repreſented as men of blood, Mic. ii. for what is life without uſefulneſs, and without enjoyment, but a dead image of life? Would we not be equally criminal, if not much more ſo, if we did what lies in our power to deprive one another of the means of living uſefully to the church, and of diſtributing the bread of life to hundreds of ſouls; unleſs we could give clear evidence from the word of God, that a neceſſity was laid upon us to treat our brethren in this manner? It is, I think, apparent, that a ſentence rejecting the overture is equivalent to a ſentence of deprivation, againſt all who are diſſatisfied with the queſtioned article. A ſentence of depoſition againſt a miniſter is, in ſome ſenſe, a ſentence of death; and mature conſideration is certainly requiſite before ſuch a ſentence is paſſed; a ſentence that affects the ſpiritual intereſts of precious ſouls whoſe number cannot be calculated, as well as their miniſters; a ſentence that muſt be either neceſſary, or exceedingly prejudicial to the church of God.

If we were ſitting in judgment upon a man for his life, no conſideration would induce us to give our voice againſt him, till we had ſeen with our own eyes that he is really guilty of the crime charged upon him, and that the crime juſtly expoſes him to death. Nothing would be taken upon truſt. The rules of legal evidence would be carefully followed. If we depended on the opinion of the wiſeſt man on earth, in ſuch a caſe, rather than on our own judgment, would not the guilt of blood haunt us all the days of our life? Would we not ſhudder at the thoughts of that account which we muſt give of all our actions, to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead? Ought we to be leſs cautious, leſt we make room for remorſe, when we are called to judge in a queſtion which is to decide on the miniſtry of the ſervants of the Lord Jeſus? and to pronounce a ſentence, which may prevent proper means from being uſed for ſaving thouſands of ſouls, not from a temporal, but from an everlaſting death? We condemn and we pity, thoſe who ſilenced

more than two thouſand miniſters in England, and many hundreds in Scotland, an hundred and thirty-five years ago, becauſe they would not comply with terms for perſiſting in their miniſtry, which their conſciences could not approve. We would not, for the empire of the univerſe, have the guilt of ſilencing one ſuch ſervant of Chriſt upon our own heads. But if we urge terms of communion, of which the ſcripture does not approve as terms of communion, the ſimilarity of our conduct to that which we deplore and reprobate is apparent. Far am I from meaning to inſinuate, that thoſe who firſt received the Weſtminſter Confeſſion of Faith into our church, were chargeable with this guilt. The natural right of men to judge in religious matters for themſelves, was not, in former times, a matter of general belief. And I ſuppoſe, that none, or next to none, till of late, who approved of the Preſbyterian plan of church-government, would have been excluded from the holy miniſtry for ſcruples on this head. But mens ſentiments are now ſo generally altered, that there are as few who now believe, as there were who formerly doubted, the magiſtrate's right to ſuppreſs error by the ſword.

If it is a crime to doubt of the magiſtrate's power *circa ſacra*, let it be conſidered, whether it is a crime of ſuch magnitude as to deſerve an eccleſiaſtical death. "I ſuppoſe," ſaid a certain ſufferer for righteouſneſs ſake to his judges, "had I been drinking or gaming in a tavern, I would not have been brought before your Lordſhip's bar. Is it a greater crime, then, to preach the goſpel to a ſet of Chriſtians who are as inoffenſive and as uſeful ſubjects to his majeſty, as any in the kingdom?" "We will have you to know," replied the recorder, "that it is a greater crime." May I not alſo aſk, Is it a greater fault to doubt about thy juſtice of compulſory meaſures in religion, than to be found guilty of drinking to exceſs, of ſlander, of reviling ones neighbours? Yet for theſe crimes a ſentence of deprivation would be eſteemed very hard, unleſs they were frequently committed. I confeſs, there is this difference, that, if we were chargeable with theſe crimes, we would profeſs our ſorrow, and promiſe reformation. But why would we be ſo ready to profeſs repentance in the one caſe, and not in the

other? Becauſe the criminality of ſuch actions is too plain from the word of God to admit of any doubt. Shew us paſſages from ſcripture which, with like plainneſs of ſpeech, reprobate the offenſive doctrine, and it is to be hoped, that all our brethren will immediately renounce it. It is no pleaſure to them to live at variance with their brethren, to expoſe themſelves to cenſure, to be under the neceſſity of acknowledging that they have erred, or to diſturb the harmony of that ſociety to which they eſteem it their honour and happineſs to belong. Nothing but their deſire of being found of Chriſt in peace without ſpot and blameleſs, could induce them to give to their brethren, or to themſelves, ſo much trouble in controverting an article of doctrine, or perhaps a mode of expreſſion, hitherto received amongſt us.

A prudent man will look well to his goings, and will avoid every thing that may ſting his conſcience with unceaſing remorſe. He will not raſhly give his vote, if he is on a Britiſh jury, to take away the life of his brother and friend. Far leſs will he be raſh, in a Chriſtian Synod, to give his vote for a deciſion which may well be eſteemed a virtual ſentence of deprivation to many of his brethren. Suppoſe we ſhould join in ſuch a vote in the preſent caſe, it will be for one of theſe two reaſons; either, becauſe we think that compulſory meaſures are principles of the doctrine of Chriſt, or becauſe we think that no ſuch doctrines are taught in our Confeſſion of Faith, and that thoſe who think ſo have themſelves to blame for their miſtake. I cannot ſee that a third reaſon different from either of theſe can be imagined. Let us conſider, whether either of them are ſuch as ought to ſatisfy our conſciences that we do well in the exerciſe of ſuch ſeverity to our brethren.

Thoſe who approve of compulſory principles in religion, no doubt, muſt think that their brethren err who diſapprove of them. But let them judge fairly and candidly. If they do not obſtinately ſhut their eyes to the truth, they muſt ſee that themſelves have openly profeſſed the ſame principles of toleration with their brethren, or at leaſt exerciſed forbearance hitherto towards thoſe who openly avowed theſe principles. What is the difference between thoſe who formerly declared againſt compulſory meaſures in religion, and thoſe who now

plead in favour of the overture? Only this, that the former took the liberty to declare their mind, in oppoſition to doctrines, which in the view of thoſe whom I am now addreſſing, ſtand in our ſtandard books; whilſt the latter endeavour to obtain a conſtitutional liberty to declare their minds that neither they nor their brethren may ſeem to condemn themſelves in that which they allow.

If there are any (I ſuppoſe they are few) who ſtill plead for compulſory meaſures, and on that ground, declare againſt the overture, that is, againſt the exerciſe of forbearance towards their brethren who think differently from themſelves, I think they would do well to beſtow a little attention on this conſideration; With what grace it will appear to the world to deny forbearance to their brethren, or in other words, to do what lies in them to inflict an eccleſiaſtical death upon a conſiderable number of brethren whom they love, and whom they highly eſteem, for no other reaſon, but their averſion to compulſory meaſures in religion. Compulſory meaſures in religion are repreſented, throughout the book of the Revelation, as a characteriſtic, not of the woman clothed with the ſun, but of the ſcarlet-coloured whore. John wondered with great admiration, when he ſaw this woman, drunken with the blood of the ſaints and martyrs of Jeſus. He would have wondered with greater admiration, if he had ſeen the woman clothed with the ſun, drunk with the blood of ſaints and martyrs. Are not the ſaints martyrs of Jeſus, who ſuffer the loſs of their offices, or uſefulneſs, dearer to them than life, that they may maintain a good conſcience; although they ſhould labour under an involuntary miſtake, even about thoſe points which are the grounds of their ſufferings?

So odious are compulſory meaſures in religion, that they have, for the moſt part, been diſavowed or tranſferred to others, even by thoſe who have practiſed them. Men who ſuffered for religion have been generally repreſented as traitors, or ſeditious members of Society, although they were the meekeſt and moſt quiet men in the land. For what reaſon? Becauſe nature itſelf reclaimed againſt impoſitions on conſcience, and that with ſuch a loud voice, that inquiſitors themſelves, the chief

miniſters of the kingdom of Moloch, could not bear the character of perſecutors.

Compulſory meaſures in religion are one of thoſe diſtinguiſhing marks of Antichriſt, againſt which Proteſtants have loudly teſtified, when they ſmarted under them; and againſt which, I think they ought at all times to teſtify, that they may be found faithful witneſſes againſt the beaſt, during the whole period of his reign. They are called witneſſes, in the book of New-Teſtament prophecies; and ought not all the capital abominations of the beaſt, mentioned in thoſe prophecies, to be the ſubject of their teſtimony? But can we conſiſtently with common ſenſe teſtify againſt this abomination in the beaſt, if we bear teſtimony, at the ſame time, againſt thoſe who are averſe to his compulſory meaſures?

The blood of thoſe who have been ſlain, becauſe they would not receive the religion of the beaſt, is in her ſkirts; and God will inflict his vengeance upon this great enemy of religion, for this very reaſon, although her other iniquities will likewiſe be called to remembrance in the day of vengeance, Rev. xviii. And Proteſtant ſocieties, as far as they take part with him, muſt expoſe themſelves to their ſhare in his puniſhment. Let us ſtand at the utmoſt diſtance from his crimes, that we may not partake of his puniſhment. But we bear teſtimony in his favours, if compulſory meaſures in religion are to be maintained as an eſſential article of our Chriſtian profeſſion.

It will no doubt be ſaid, that there is a great difference, between the ſuppreſſion of error by the civil magiſtrate, and the compulſory meaſures of the Church of Rome. Perhaps there is; but is the difference in nature, or in degree only? There were differences between the hereſies of the apoſtolic age, and the hereſies of the man of ſin; and yet the Apoſtle ſays, that in his time, the myſtery of iniquity was already working. I am perſuaded, that wherever the doctrine of compulſory methods for ſupporting religion is patronized, the myſtery of iniquity ſtill works; and who knows what effects it may produce, unleſs it is purged out, or what pretences it may afford to them who ſeek occaſion to palliate their own violent councils? It is not univerſal-

ly agreed that the ſlaying of the witneſſes is yet paſt. If it is not, I wiſh that till it were, the doctrine of compulſory meaſures in religion was baniſhed from all the Proteſtant churches, and every trace of them obliterated from the remembrance of men. Cranmer, the great reformer of England, had uſed the ſword of the magiſtrate, in the days of Edward VI. for ſuppreſſing hereſy. Some heretics were, with his allowance, put to a violent death. Could he complain that the ſword was turned againſt himſelf in the following reign? I confeſs that Cranmer was not really an heretic, as the perſons were to whom compulſory meaſures were applied in the reign of Edward. But was it reaſonable to expect, that Mary ſhould think herſelf obliged to take Cranmer's directions about the execution of the laws againſt hereſy? They were made for the ſuppreſſion of thoſe doctrines which were called hereſies by a judge who claimed infallibility; and it is much to be lamented, that ever they were applied to any other purpoſe.

I believe that ſeveral brethren who oppoſe the overture will think, that a very unjuſt reflection is thrown upon our excellent ſtandards, when an inſinuation is thrown out that they are tinctured in the leaſt degree, with ſuch hateful principles. I would aſk ſuch brethren, why they wiſh to throw out of their communion, brethren who differ from them, not in any doctrine, but in the ſenſe which they affix to certain words in an uninſpired compoſition? Would not this be doting about words, to a degree of phrenſy, beyond what is ordinarily found in maniacs? Would it not imply a far greater regard to words, than to the doctrines expreſſed by them, to baniſh from our ſociety thoſe who agree with us in ſentiments, and differ in words, whilſt we retain thoſe who differ in ſentiments, and agree in words? Would it not be a moſt complete perverſion of the deſign of confeſſions of faith, which were intended to be a teſt of uniformity, not in modes of ſpeech, but in the doctrines expreſſed by them? The ancient fathers of the church have been held up to very undeſerved deriſion, for contending ſo warmly againſt a diphthong in the controverſy of the Homouſion. But would we not expoſe ourſelves and our profeſſion to a ridicule too well merited,

if we ſhould contend bitterly about the propriety or impropriety of certain words for expreſſing certain ſentiments? "For words deſtroy not the work of God." Gallio was quite miſtaken when he thought that the queſtion between Paul and his enemies, reſpected only words and names. But if the queſtion had been ſuch as he ſuppoſed it to be, he certainly judged rightly, that it was not his province to judge of ſuch matters. If Chriſtian divines in every age had been as wiſe, they would have brought far fewer miſchiefs on the church of the living God.

Perhaps it may be ſaid, that the friends of the overture do not entertain the ſame ſentiments with thoſe enemies of it, who diſlike compulſory meaſures in religion; becauſe they refuſe the magiſtrate every ſpecies of religious power. I anſwer, ſome of them may, perhaps, do ſo. But why are they all to be expelled from the ſociety, becauſe ſome of them differ from their brethren in their views on this ſubject? But, perhaps, this too may be little more than a difference in words. All the power in religion which can well be allowed to him by the enemies of compulſory meaſures, is a power to protect the church in her adminiſtrations, and to make a comfortable proviſion for her miniſters. I ſee no reaſon any man has to deny ſuch power to the civil magiſtrate, and I ſuppoſe it will not be denied to him by thoſe who ſay he has no power at all in religion. At any rate, the difference between the diſputants on this ſubject, does not appear to be either important or intereſting to us.

Beſides what has been ſaid to thoſe, who though they diſlike the overture, are enemies at the ſame time, to compulſory meaſures in religion, I think it might be aſked of them, not only, whether they give to the words of the diſputed articles in our Confeſſion of Faith, their ordinary meaning, but likewiſe, whether they have read and conſidered what is ſaid in our old Scotch Confeſſion of Faith on this ſubject, and whether they have read our books of diſcipline, and thoſe acts of Parliament, to which our National Covenant refers? It is plain, that the National Covenant is an engagement to maintain the doctrine taught in our old Confeſſion of Faith, and our

books of diſcipline. It is no leſs plain, that the Weſtminſter Confeſſion of Faith was received by the Church of Scotland, as a Confeſſion conformable in all things (excepting one point which needed limitation), to the former Confeſſion of the Church of Scotland. If compulſory principles are not recognized in the Covenant and Confeſſion, conſidered in their reference to former declarations of the principles of the Church of Scotland, I deſpair of our being able to underſtand the plaineſt book, or of being able to prove from Scripture any point of Chriſtian doctrine. The ſame rules of interpretation, which would free our fathers from all tincture of ſuch principles, would, I am perſuaded, ſerve heretics to anſwer every argument which we can draw from Scripture to combat their pernicious errors.

I would further wiſh thoſe brethren to whom I now ſpeak, to conſider, whether our ſtandards do not at leaſt ſeem to favour thoſe compulſory maxims which they diſavow. We ought to avoid, not only all evil, but all appearance of evil; and to cut off all occaſion from them that wiſh to reproach us. Thoſe who reproach us as men of bloody principles, have this at leaſt to ſay, That the articles in queſtion eaſily admit of the interpretation which they give them. If we are to provide for things honeſt in the ſight of all men, we are under double obligations to provide againſt every plauſible ground of cenſure againſt that holy profeſſion which we make; and it is very poſſible that the ſame words, which gave little or no occaſion for reproach in the days of our fathers, many now give a great deal. The meaning of words, and mens turn of thinking, are in a perpetual flux. We find Moſes declaring, that God tempted Abraham. Who would ſay, that the expreſſion of God's tempting a man was improperly uſed by Moſes? And yet an inſpired Apoſtle warns us againſt the uſe of the very ſame expreſſion, becauſe a meaning would, in his days, have been affixed to it, very different from that in which it was uſed by Moſes.

Fifthly, An argument may be drawn from our own prayers for the alteration propoſed. We pray for the peace of Jeruſalem, and for the healing of all thoſe

breaches that have taken place among the lovers of the name and Goſpel of Chriſt. But it is evident, that in our devotional exerciſes, we deal falſely with God, unleſs we uſe all means competent to us for obtaining thoſe bleſſings for which we make requeſt. Should we pray for the divine bleſſing on the means about to be uſed for the propagation of the Goſpel among the Heathen, and yet refuſe to give a ſingle penny to promote the good work, would we not be juſtly chargeable with prevarication? Are we leſs chargeable with it, if we pray daily for a bleſſed union among the lovers of Chriſt, and yet refuſe to contribute in the leaſt degree to that union?

But how are we to contribute to it? Let us ſay what we will about the magiſtrate's power in religion, we are not magiſtrates; and we will not eaſily prevail on the governors of nations to draw their ſwords for the ſuppreſſion of what we call hereſy. If they ſhould, would they deſerve commendation? That excellent Prince Theodorick, king of the Oſtrogoths in Italy, though deſtitute of letters, was ſo well taught by common ſenſe the abſurdity of converſions brought about by fear or favour, that when one of his miniſters embraced his own religion to pleaſe him, he ordered his head to be cut off, ſaying, Thoſe who are not faithful to their religion, will not be faithful to their prince. What Theodorick learned from his own reaſon, other princes have now generally learned from the experience of ages.

But ſuppoſe this plan were put into execution, would we be forward to aſſiſt in it? We are certainly bound to be exemplary in ſuch a work, if it is indeed a good work. But in doing ſo, whether would we be the followers of Chriſt and his apoſtles, or of the celebrated St Dominic, of Gardiner and Bonner, of Graham of Claverhouſe and Grierſon of Lag?

No, you will ſay, our method of conciliating thoſe who differ from us ſhould be the ſame with Paul's. We will imitate the meekneſs and gentleneſs of Chriſt. We will ſhew all meekneſs unto all men, and will cultivate friendſhip with thoſe who differ in ſentiments from us, that they may ſee how falſe all imputations are, which aſcribe to us and to our profeſſion, bigotry and bloody principles. Well, all this is right. But if you ſtill re-

fuſe to give up with the principle, that the magiſtrate's power to ſuppreſs hereſy is an eſſential article of Chriſtian religion, what will they think of your kind behaviour? They will conſider it as a falſe and ſhameful pretence; as a piece of hypocriſy, like that of the Emperor Charles V. when he ordered prayers to be made in all the churches of Spain, for the relief of the Pope, who was then in his own hands. Expreſs kindneſs, if you pleaſe, to hereties; or, if you rather chooſe it, let it be known that you wiſh them to be extirpated, to be ſuppreſſed by the ſword of the civil magiſtrate. But join not two ſuch inconſiſtent profeſſions together. It would be too groſs inconſiſtency for hypocriſy itſelf to practiſe. Hypocriſy avoids publiſhing its inconſiſtencies in the face of day.

But you will ſay, Heretics are out of the queſtion. We will treat them as John treated Cerinthus, and as Polycarp treated Marcion. But the lovers of Chriſt, who are not joined in communion with us, are not heretics. They labour under ſuch miſtakes only as are common to good men; and therefore we can, with all ſincerity, profeſs the warmeſt attachment to them. But are they not ſchiſmatics, and do you not profeſs to believe, that ſchiſm, as well as hereſy, is to be proceeded againſt by the power of the civil magiſtrate? If they are not ſchiſmatics, why are not you and they members of the ſame communion? When the lovers of Chriſt cannot ſit down at the ſame holy table, the blame of ſchiſm muſt reſt with thoſe whoſe ſentiments, or behaviour, is the cauſe why they cannot do it.

But what means do you uſe for removing the obſtacles that prevent your ſitting at the ſame holy table of the Lord? Are no other means requiſite for this purpoſe, but mutual kindneſs and civility, ſuch as ought to have place among all people that are removed but one degree above the rank of barbarians? Is it enough for you to endeavour to convince them that they are miſtaken in thoſe points wherein they differ from you? You will ſhew the ſame favour to Papiſts, to Mahometans, if they will give you leave. If we ſincerely wiſh for a coalition amongſt the various parties of Chriſtians that appear to entertain a ſincere regard to the name of our Lord

Jeſus Chriſt, we ought willingly to ſubmit our received notions to an examination, in points wherein they differ from us.

You have already, you ſay, examined all your principles, and you have found them certainly true and good. If they are ſo, they may well bear a ſecond examination. An honeſt man is never afraid of having his integrity put to the trial. A candid enquirer into truth is never afraid of having his notions examined. If they are not ſolid, he wiſhes to renounce them. If they are, they will come forth from the trial, like gold from the fire. If they were formerly believed, the belief of them will be ſtrengthened and confirmed; and the confirmation of our faith in the truths which we profeſs, is of no ſmall conſequence in a free-thinking age.

You ſay, that all your notions in religion, by which you are diſtinguiſhed from other religious parties, are juſt and ſound. So ſay all your neighbours around you, and, therefore, they will not ſubmit them to a review. If you blame them for their obſtinacy, their anſwer is, That you ſet them the example. And your apology for your conduct is inconſiſtent with common reaſon. You will not have your principles of belief called in queſtion along with theirs, becauſe you are ſure that yours are right, and theirs are wrong. But for this very reaſon, if it is a juſt one, you ought cheerfully to comply with the propoſed examination, becauſe you have all reaſon to believe that it will turn out to your advantage. When the queſtion is, which of twenty perſons was guilty of a theft, which muſt be placed to the account of one of the number; undoubtedly, he who declines a trial will be ſuſpected as the criminal.

We ought to prove all things, and to hold faſt that which is good; but we are not to hold faſt any thing as good till it is proved; and when it is proved, our hold of it will not be the leſs firm, that we ſuffer it to be tried anew. Stedfaſtneſs in what we know to be right, is neceſſary for maintaining the truth; but a blind adherence to what men have received from their fathers, is the great ſupport of all error in the world, and the great obſtruction to the propagation of the truth.

But what I propoſe at preſent, is not the examination of the truth of the doctrines which we have received, but the examination of the importance of them, and of the right which they have to be made terms of communion, to the excluſion of every Chriſtian from our ſociety, who does not acknowledge them. The truths of God are precious; but for that reaſon we ought to be careful how we impoſe them. Like the law, they are good, if a man uſe them lawfully; but other truths of God may be greatly abuſed as well as the law. Through the corruption of human nature, they, as well as the law, may be turned into engines of variance, contention, wrath and diviſions. Inſtead of nouriſhing the ſpiritual life, they are, in ſuch caſes, turned into occaſions to the fleſh. They are perverted from the purpoſe for which they were revealed, into engines for the advancement of the intereſts of ſatan, in direct oppoſition to the kingdom of Chriſt, which is righteouſneſs and peace and joy in the Holy Ghoſt. The veſſels of the houſe of God were not more lamentably profaned, when they were placed in the temple of Bel, or uſed for drunken revels, than the truths of God, when they are made inſtrumental for excluding thoſe men from the miniſtry, who are fitted and called to it by Chriſt; or excluding thoſe from the miniſtry, who have been placed in it by Chriſt, and have not forfeited their office; or for keeping in a ſtate of variance thoſe fellow-Chriſtians, who ought to be in the ſame communion.

The doctrines which we profeſs may be all ſound, and yet not fit to be made articles of communion; and it is not to be expected, whatever prayers are made to God for the happy union of Chriſtians, that it will be effected, till God pour down a ſpirit of gentleneſs and forbearance among Chriſtians, inclining them to receive thoſe who differ in ſome opinions from themſelves, into the ſame bonds of communion, that they may, with one mind and one mouth, glorify God; and that they may converſe and diſpute about thoſe things wherein they differ, in the ſpirit of friendſhip and Chriſtianity.

This, it may be ſaid, would be a renunciation of thoſe things wherein they differ. If, for inſtance, we ſhould receive thoſe men into communion with us, who

do not acknowledge the binding obligation of the Covenants, we totally relinquish that important point of doctrine, and thus bury in oblivion the noble contendings of our fathers for the cause of God; and if we receive into our communion those who deny that the civil magistrate ought to suppress blasphemy and idolatry, we renounce an essential part of the moral law.

But did the Apostle Paul renounce the doctrine, that the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles was broken down by Christ, and that the enmity, even the law of commandments, contained in ordinances, was abolished in his cross, when he communicated with the believing Jews who were of a different judgment? This plain example may, I think, put to silence the lying, or at least the erring lips of those who charge the people or the ministers of Christ with apostacy, as renouncing all those doctrines which they scruple to hold as terms of communion. Paul did more than communicate with the weak Jews who believed in Christ. He became to them as a Jew; he circumcised Timothy. He shaved his head at Cenchrea, because he had a vow. He contributed to the expence of offering sacrifices in the temple. And yet who will say, that Paul in any degree departed from the great principle of Christian liberty? Who of the apostles held it more firmly than Paul?

I know some have alleged, that Paul erred in making himself a Jew, to such a degree as to join those who offered sacrifice in the temple. If so, then James, and all the rulers of the Church at Jerusalem, erred with him. I had almost said, that I would rather err with Paul and James, than be right with those who condemn them. But let it be so that they erred. Would those who blame them have separated themselves from Paul, if they had lived in his days, because of his error? If they would have born with him, may they not bear with men from whom so much less is to be expected? If none would deny forbearance to their brethren, who are not themselves infallible, there would not be so many unhappy breaches in the church.

Instead of renouncing any doctrines of Christianity, by excluding them from our terms of communion, if they are not scriptural terms, we take the easiest, the

beſt, and the moſt effectual methods to ſupport them. As every man will ſtand ſafeſt in his own proper place, ſo the truths of God will be moſt effectually ſupported when they occupy their proper room. Set them in an higher place than that in which they ought to ſtand, and you raiſe a formidable oppoſition againſt them, which will bend all its endeavours, not to bring them down to their proper place, but to ſubvert and deſtroy them. Would ſo many ill-natured reflections have been thrown out againſt our Covenanters; would ſo many attempts have been made to prove that they are not obligatory, if they had not been above meaſure extolled by their friends, as if our fathers had been more than men, and our Covenants given by inſpiration of God? Had the Covenants never been made terms of communion, and enforced by civil penalties, I think it highly probable that the full effect of them would have been gained, and that the Preſbyterian profeſſion of religion would have been eſtabliſhed in England on foundations not eaſy to be ſhaken.

It is neceſſary to hold thoſe doctrines as terms of communion, which are eſſential to the Chriſtian life, or neceſſary for maintaining the peace, the liberty of the Chriſtian church, and the government and diſcipline eſtabliſhed in her by Chriſt. Men cannot walk together except they be agreed. But there are points not neceſſary for any of theſe purpoſes, which, nevertheleſs, we believe to be revealed by God, and proper ſubjects of that Chriſtian zeal which is not indifferent to any religious truth. How are theſe to be held faſt and propagated? If you make them articles of communion, you hinder every man from aſſociating with you as a church-member, who is not already aſſured of the truth of them. Thus you both raiſe a prejudice againſt them in the minds of your neighbours, and deprive yourſelves of many favourable opportunities, which you might have enjoyed, for inſtructing thoſe who are yet ignorant, or under miſtakes about thoſe doctrines which you wiſh to inculcate.

Did the Apoſtles of our Lord make the liberty wherewith Chriſt had made his people free, a term of communion to the believing Jews? or did they betray that pre-

cious doctrine by the indulgence which they gave to thoſe erring Chriſtians? They not only admitted them to communion with the church, but, to gratify them, they enjoined the Gentiles to abſtain from things ſtrangled, and from blood. Did not theſe methods effectually ſerve the cauſe of Chriſtian liberty? If the Jews had been forced, either to renounce communion with the church, or their belief of the binding obligation of the ceremonial law, would they not have been driven at once from the church? We may at leaſt ſay this, That the impoſers of ſuch a term of communion would have brought upon themſelves the guilt of driving them out of the church. God could have made them ſtand firm in the doctrine which they had learned. But that would not have leſſened the guilt of thoſe, who had laid ſtumbling-blocks in their way, by rigorous terms of communion. No man can actually deſtroy thoſe for whom Chriſt died; and yet Paul heſitates not to ſpeak of thoſe who lay ſtumbling-blocks in the way of their brethren, as if they had cauſed thoſe to periſh for whom Chriſt died. The criminality of our conduct, when it is bad in itſelf, is not diminiſhed by the grace of God in preventing its effects.

The Apoſtles, taught by the Spirit of their Lord, were ſo far from forcing the above-mentioned principle upon the Jews, that they required the Gentiles to accommodate themſelves in ſome degree to the prejudices of their Jewiſh brethren. The conſequence was, what might have been expected from ſuch meekneſs of wiſdom. They enjoyed the opportunity of preparing the believing Jews for receiving with meekneſs that doctrine which would have been rejected with indignation, if it had been made an eſſential part of Chriſtian doctrine, as ſoon as the Apoſtles themſelves had learned it. I am perſuaded, that the like good effects would ſtill reſult from the like imitation of the meekneſs and gentleneſs of Chriſt.

I have hitherto ſpoken of the diſputed articles of our Confeſſion of Faith. What has been ſaid of them, may, in all its force, be applied to the diſputed articles in our

National Covenant, and in our Solemn League and Covenant.

If compulſory meaſures are not recogniſed in the Covenants, their language is, at leaſt, ambiguous; and no words of dubious meaning are to be admitted into vows and oaths. Indeed, no ambiguous words appear to me to have found any place in theſe vows. According to their obvious meaning, they bind the ſwearers of them to concur, according to their places, in extirpating all heretics and ſchiſmatics by all civil pains, and to treat thoſe men as rebels againſt the King, who could not ſubſcribe every article of the Confeſſion of Faith.

It is alleged, indeed, that our fathers did not perſecute men, otherwiſe peaceable members of ſociety, who differed from them in points of religion. If they did not, I do not ſee how they can be vindicated from the charge of perjury, on the ſuppoſition that theſe articles in the Covenants bound the ſwearers of them. I know, and I heartily admit the apology ſo often made for our fathers. Few who differed from them in religious ſentiments, were peaceable members of ſociety in Scotland, during the covenanting period under Charles I. But this apology could not be extended to us, were we to come under the ſame engagements, or to acknowledge ourſelves bound, by the ancient engagements of the nation, to uſe ſuch methods for the ſuppreſſion of every thing inconſiſtent with the goſpel of Chriſt.

Unleſs we acknowledge ourſelves bound to uſe ſuch methods, as ſoon as we have opportunity, to extirpate hereſy and ſchiſm, and can willingly, and from the bottom of our hearts, pledge ourſelves to promote, to the utmoſt of our power, every law that may, at any time, be enacted for the ſuppreſſion of every doctrine inconſiſtent with any part of our old Scots Confeſſion of Faith, an alteration in the Formula reſpecting the Covenants appears to me abſolutely neceſſary. I ſuppoſe the greateſt enemies of the overture amongſt us would not wiſh to ſee all civil pains and penalties employed, for enlightening the minds of their brethren who differ from them about the religious power of the magiſtrate; and yet, according to the National Covenant, they ought to be held rebellious ſubjects; and (if the laws now permit-

ted it) thoſe who own the Covenants binding in this article, muſt reckon themſelves bound in conſcience to give all poſſible aſſiſtance to the magiſtrate, in bringing them to that puniſhment which rebels deſerve.

Let an alteration, it may be ſaid, by all means, be admitted in this part of the Formula, ſo expreſſed as to make this part of them a matter of forbearance; but let the binding obligation of theſe ſacred vows, in every thing elſe, be ſtill acknowledged and enforced as a term of communion. But would it not argue a ſelfiſh narrowneſs of mind, to ſeek relief to our own conſciences, by having ſuch an alteration made in this point as ſuits our own ſentiments, without attending to the views of thoſe who are as warm friends to our covenanted reformation as ourſelves, although they do not reckon the Covenants of our fathers binding upon us in the ſame way as if we ourſelves, with uplifted hands, had ſworn them? Every article in the Covenants they deem to be binding on us by the word of God, except this article which we ourſelves think unwarranted by it. They go ſtill further; they think that the act of our fathers lays a very ſtrong obligation upon us to cleave to thoſe principles, that our fathers may not riſe up againſt us at the great day, and bear witneſs againſt us as apoſtates from that profeſſion which they have ſo nobly handed down to us at the expence of labour and of blood; from that profeſſion which they ſolemnly ſware to maintain, and to tranſmit to poſterity. Some would not ſcruple, with ſuch views, to declare that they acknowledge the binding obligation of the Covenants; and who could certainly ſay, that they would be inſincere in making this declaration? Some have declared, that this was all they meant by the binding obligation of the Covenants after they had ſolemnly recogniſed it; and yet they have not been called to account by the members of our body. This I take to be in effect a plain evidence, that the article in queſtion has been hitherto eſteemed by our Synod a fit matter of forbearance. The only, or the chief difference between ſome of the moſt highly reſpected of our fathers, now in a better world, and thoſe brethren who ſcruple to acknowledge the binding obligation of the Covenants, ſeems merely to lie in words; and ſurely

no Chriſtian will think that words, abſtracted from their meaning, ought to be made terms of communion.

The queſtion about the civil magiſtrate's power in religion has been handled ſeparately from the queſtion about the binding obligation of the Covenants, to avoid confuſion; but moſt, though not perhaps all, of the arguments that have been uſed in defence of the overture reſpecting the firſt of theſe points, are evidently applicable to the laſt of them. He who has taken the trouble to read what has been ſaid, will perhaps think that he has read enough for both theſe points; and might think his underſtanding affronted by a mere application of the ſame arguments to a queſtion which muſt, in all appearance, be decided the ſame way as the other.

If two preachers handle the ſame ſubject, and uſe arguments to enforce the ſame doctrine or duty, or to warn men againſt the ſame ſin, they will not, if they are wiſe, debate with one another about the propriety of one another's reaſonings, although one of them may, perhaps, not ſee much force in one or two of the reaſonings employed by the other. They will rejoice, if the end they had in view is gained, although the one may think that a proper argument has been omitted by his brother; and the other may think, that his brother has joined an argument of little weight to others that were abundantly ſufficient to have ſet it beyond all doubt. Such as this is the difference about the binding obligation of our Covenants amongſt brethren equally zealous for our covenanted reformation.

Another conſideration, which I think may juſtly render it queſtionable, whether the obligation of the Covenants upon poſterity ought to be made a term of communion is, that no terms of communion in the Chriſtian church, ought to depend on any other authority, but that of the New Teſtament, which no where declares, that our public covenants ever exiſted.

If the queſtion were, whether public covenants are binding on poſterity? an anſwer might eaſily be given to it from the Scripture, That they certainly are, if they are lawful in themſelves. If the queſtion were, whether the major part of the people in Scotland ſware the National Covenant and Solemn League and Covenant?

I would anſwer, that they certainly did, as I have learned from credible teſtimony. But as I have not learned it from the Bible, it is no part of my faith. I am perſuaded, that they who doubt of it are either uninformed or miſtaken; but I cannot think that they deſerve, for their ignorance or their miſtake, to be excluded from any Chriſtian privilege, if they make a credible profeſſion of attachment to all that is revealed in the word of God. I ſuppoſe the greater part of our people have no better aſſurance of the fact than the teſtimony of their miniſters. But will thoſe miniſters ſuſpend the admiſſion of their people to Chriſtian privileges on the confidence which they may have of their own good information concerning tranſactions which took place in the ſixteenth or ſeventeenth centuries? It is well known to all who are much converſant with books, that human hiſtories muſt always be read with caution. It is acknowledged by all Chriſtians, who deſerve the name, that there is as great difference between human and divine authority, as between the ſliding ſand and an immoveable rock.

Now, we cannot declare our belief of the binding obligation of our public Covenants, without declaring our belief, that theſe Covenants were ſworn with ſuch circumſtances as to make them a national deed. Perhaps this point may require larger diſcuſſion to aſcertain it to the judgment of many candid enquirers, than ſome of us think. It is, however, a point that cannot be diſcuſſed from texts of Scripture; and therefore it can make no part of the faith of Chriſtians. "To the law "and to the teſtimony:" what is not found there, is not an article of Chriſtian communion impoſed by Chriſt.

If the whole nation entered into the public Covenants, it might be proper to enquire how they were induced to do it. Did they voluntarily enter into theſe engagements, or were a great part of them overawed into them by the fear of civil penalties; whilſt others wiſhed to make their court to the prevailing party, by affecting a lively zeal for all their meaſures? We know too well, that there were diſſemblers and cowards in our fathers' days, as well as in our own.

I do not ſay, that the obligation of our Solemn Covenants depends on the anſwer to this queſtion; for there

may be very great irregularities in impoſing or in ſwearing oaths, which do not affect the obligation of them. But what does not affect the obligation of our Covenants may very materially affect the queſtion, Whether the binding obligation of them ought to be made a term of communion? becauſe no terms of communion ought to be impoſed, which will miniſter queſtions, rather than godly edifying, among the lovers of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.

I have already endeavoured to prove, that we ought not to exclude lovers of Chriſt from communion with us, for difference of ſentiment about the power of magiſtrates in religion. But thoſe who allow the magiſtrate no power in religion, will find it difficult to ſatisfy themſelves about the binding obligation of National Covenants; becauſe it is not eaſy to ſee, on their principles, how a religious covenant can be a national deed, unleſs it is ſworn by every individual in the nation; as men in public offices cannot repreſent private perſons, nor act in any other than in their individual capacity. But it is well known, that many in the nation of Scotland, ſtill a greater number in England, and the great body of the Iriſh nation, refuſed to ſwear our public Covenants.

Are the National Covenants of theſe lands binding upon the Iriſh nation? If they are, upon what ground are they binding upon a nation, where they were ſworn only by a very ſmall part of it; and a part who, according to the principles of thoſe who deny the magiſtrate's power in religion, had no manner of right to lay their neighbours under any religious engagement? But if the nation of Ireland is not bound by it, how far does the obligation reach in Scotland and England? Does it extend to the whole iſland? or does it extend only to the children of the ſwearers, and to thoſe who join in Chriſtian fellowſhip with thoſe religious ſocieties who profeſs the ſame principles with our anceſtors? If their obligation is thus confined, it is plain that theſe Covenants do not bind the nations themſelves; and that it will be impoſſible to ſay who elſe are bound by them, except thoſe who voluntarily declare themſelves Preſbyterians. And it does not ſeem to me to be a matter

of ſo great importance to determine whether they are binding on Preſbyterians, as to juſtify diſſentions on that head. All who are members of our churches will undoubtedly confeſs, that we are under the engagement of public covenants, to ſtand faſt in thoſe principles which we profeſs. For how can we be members of a viſible church, without coming under engagements to hold faſt its doctrines, and to walk in thoſe ways which it conſiders as the ways of the Lord? If one of my brethren ſays, that he acknowledges himſelf obliged by the moſt ſacred engagements, by the moſt ſolemn covenants, to proſecute all the ends of the Covenants of our fathers, as far as they conſiſt with Chriſtian liberty, am I authoriſed, by the laws of Chriſt, to renounce all church-fellowſhip with him, becauſe he does not think preciſely as I do concerning the mode in which he has been brought under that engagement?

It will be obſerved, that I do not aſk an anſwer to ſome of thoſe queſtions which I have been propoſing. Perhaps I could anſwer them as well as ſome of my opponents. What I aſk is, Does it not appear, from thoſe doubts which may be ſtarted about the obligation of our Covenants, that it would not be conſiſtent with the meekneſs and gentleneſs that is in Chriſt, to impoſe it as a term of communion upon all that bear office in the church, till it be proved, that the article reſpecting the civil magiſtrate's power in religion, ought likewiſe to be a term of communion?

Ought it not, likewiſe, to be well conſidered, before the point is determined, what the real difference is between the ſentiments of thoſe brethren who readily acknowledge the binding obligation of the Covenants, and thoſe who heſitate to do it? What if the difference between the brethren on the one ſide, and ſome of the brethren on the other, ſhould be found to conſiſt only in the meaning of the words!

All the brethren who heſitate about acknowledging the binding obligation of the Covenants, readily confeſs, that we are bound to proſecute the ends of them, and that if we do not, our ſin is highly aggravated by what our fathers did: Only they cannot ſee that our obligation is preciſely the ſame, as if we ourſelves had ſworn theſe

Covenants. Now, ſome reſpectable brethren have lived and died in communion with us, who openly declared, that all they meant by the binding obligation of the Covenants was the very ſame with what thoſe brethren maintain, who cannot ſee that this is the proper meaning of the expreſſion. Shall we expel them from our communion, becauſe they have different views from their brethren of the meaning of certain expreſſions? Gallio would not ſo much as hear at his tribunal a complaint againſt Chriſtian preachers, if it reſpected only words and names; and, according to Paul's doctrine, thoſe who waſte their time and their temper in ſtrifes of words, are proud, ignorant and delirious, 1 Tim. vi. 4. orig.

But if theſe brethren hold every thing that many others meant, when they acknowledge the binding obligation of the Covenants, why do they ſcruple to uſe the ſame form of words? Do they pretend to greater tenderneſs of conſcience than thoſe venerable men, under whoſe patronage they wiſh to ſhelter their opinions? They do not wiſh to ſhelter their opinions under any man's patronage; nor do they pretend to find the leaſt fault, either with thoſe brethren who acknowledge the binding obligation of the Covenants in the utmoſt latitude, or with thoſe who acknowledge it only in that reſtricted meaning which is now given. But they fear an oath, as they believe their brethren alſo do; and therefore they dare not come under an oath, unleſs, in their own view, as well as in other mens view, the words of it expreſs the ſentiments of their minds.

Should it be ſaid, That the brethren who ſcruple to declare their belief of the binding obligation of the Covenants do thereby calumniate our Reformers, I pity the weakneſs of thoſe reaſoning powers which can draw ſuch a concluſion from ſuch premiſes. The famous Council of Nice condemned ſecond marriages in clergymen; and had they done nothing elſe worthy of the leaſt blame, would not that be ſufficient to hinder any of us from coming under obligations to maintain all its canons; and yet what orthodox Chriſtian does not entertain the higheſt veneration for that aſſembly? I entertain a high veneration for the firſt fathers of the Seceſſion; but I ſhould be chargeable with idolatry, were I to admit all

their religious ſentiments, or any one of them, without being ſatisfied in my own judgment, that they are agreeable to the word of God. I am perſuaded, that all our brethren in the miniſtry entertain a high veneration for our covenanting anceſtors, and believe, that, allowing for human frailty, they diſcovered an eminent degree of zeal, of magnanimity, and other Chriſtian virtues, in this, as well as in other parts of their conduct. I ſhould reckon them ill informed in the hiſtory of our church, if they did not. But I ſhould entertain a worſe opinion of them, if veneration for their memory were to take the lead of their judgment in the things of God.

Perhaps it would not be amiſs to conſider, on the other ſide, what are the real ſentiments of ſome brethren who wiſh to enforce the ancient Formula, concerning thoſe points in our Covenants which have the greateſt influence in deciding the judgment of thoſe brethren who differ from them.

That which appears chiefly objectionable to all, and the only thing objectionable to many, in our Covenants, is the approbation they give, or ſeem to give, to civil pains and penalties in matters of religion. Now it is well known, that ſome who are animated with the moſt ardent zeal for enforcing the obligation of our Covenants, do themſelves condemn civil pains and penalties in matters of religion. Far be it from me to ſay, that theſe brethren do not fear an oath. I am perſuaded that they do; and therefore I am perſuaded, that, if they believed ſuch penalties to be approved in the body of the Covenants, they would themſelves think ſome change in the Formula neceſſary.

But how will they be induced to believe, that ſuch penalties are approved in the Covenants? I am amazed that any thing more is neceſſary for this purpoſe, than the reading of the acts of Parliament to which we are referred in the National Covenant, and which the ſwearers bind themſelves to concur in enforcing, according to their various places and ſtations.

It appears evident to me, that thoſe who reckon themſelves bound, without exception, by every thing contained in the Covenants, ſhould endeavour, as ſoon as a favourable opportunity offers, to obtain laws for puniſhing

with confiſcation, baniſhment, and death itſelf, all thoſe of their brethren who are of oppoſite ſentiments to their own; and that, if they can ever obtain ſuch a law, they ought, with as much eagerneſs, to proſecute their brethren, as was ever uſed by a Turner, a Graham, a Dalziel, to purſue our fathers upon the mountains.

I am ſure our brethren abhor ſuch thoughts, and I doubt not ſuch thoughts as theſe would have been abhorred by our covenanting anceſtors. But the queſtion is not, what our brethren think, or what our fathers thought before them? The queſtion is, What is the unforced meaning of theſe Covenants, the binding obligation of which on all poſterity we are called to acknowledge?

It will probably be inferred, from what I have here ſaid, That I am a determined enemy to our ſolemn Covenants. But this inference, I think, will not be conſiſtent either with juſtice or charity. I have ſaid nothing that ſhould induce any man to ſuppoſe that I do not believe the binding obligation of the Covenants on poſterity, excepting only in as far as they ſeem to me to approve of civil pains and penalties in religion. And I ſuppoſe moſt of the brethren that think differently from me, will own their binding obligation no further. The only difference between them and myſelf is, that they have not the ſame views of the meaning of certain clauſes in them that I have. And I confeſs that I was very unwilling to receive conviction concerning this part of their contents, till candour obliged me to receive it. I could wiſh that the whole nation admitted of their binding obligation, in every thing conſiſtent with liberty of conſcience; but I do not wiſh, that the profeſſion of ſuch a belief ſhould be forced upon men who think differently, and who are, at the ſame time, more zealous than I myſelf am, for the honour of Chriſt, and for the purity of his inſtitutions.

But why do you ſpeak diſreſpectfully of any thing contained in our Covenants, if you are a friend to them? My anſwer to thoſe who aſk this queſtion is, Why do you ſpeak diſreſpectfully of any of the ſentiments of that great man of God, Martin Luther, if you are a friend to the Reformation? Were you importuned to ſubſcribe

the Lutheran Confeſſion of Faith, in order to teſtify your approbation of Luther's conduct, would you not think the requeſt very ſtrange? You would ſay, that no man ought to ſubſcribe that Confeſſion of Faith, unleſs in his judgment he approves of every article of it. To ſhew the reaſon you have for your refuſal, you would think yourſelf not only warranted, but compelled, to declare what you think wrong in the principles of Luther. And you would certainly think that great wrong was done to you, if you were charged with malignity to Luther, or hoſtility to the Reformation, on this account.

I think, that Luther deſerves high admiration for that ſyſtem of doctrine which he taught, conſidering the diſadvantages under which he began his work; and that we would be very unjuſt to his memory, if we did not think his doctrine of conſubſtantiation excuſeable, when we conſider that he was educated in the belief of tranſubſtantiation. At the ſame time, if any amongſt us ſhould teach the ſame doctrine, he would deſerve depoſition. For a like reaſon, I think the miſtake that appears in our Covenants, reſpecting the enforcement of religious truth, very excuſeable in them; but I would think the belief of the ſame miſtaken opinion very inexcuſeable in us, and the profeſſion of that belief where it did not exiſt, abſolutely inſufferable.

"I am become a fool in glorying, ye have compel-"led me," ſays Paul. We may be compelled to ſay things which we are unwilling to ſay, by thoſe very men who find fault with us for ſaying them. Writers of the church of Rome treat the Proteſtant writers with great abuſe, for taking occaſion ſo frequently to publiſh every thing they can find in Scripture to the diſcredit of the virgin Mary and of the apoſtle Peter. What can the champion of the Proteſtant religion ſay, in anſwer to this charge? "Ye have compelled us. Some of you ſay, that the virgin Mary had no ſin: all of you claim honours for Mary and Peter, to which no mere creatures are entitled. We are compelled by you to prove that they were ſinners like ourſelves. We call Mary a bleſſed woman, the glory of her ſex; but zeal for the truth, and for the incommunicable glories of her Son

and Saviour, lay us under the diſagreeable neceſſity of proving that ſhe had her faults."

We find, that Paul uſes ſome ſtrange expreſſions concerning a law which he knew to be every way worthy of its Divine Author, "the law of commandments contain-"ed in ordinances." But he had good reaſon for uſing theſe expreſſions. When he called it "weak and beg-"garly elements," he expoſed himſelf not only to harſh cenſures, but to ſevere perſecutions. Yet he thought it a neceſſary duty, by ſuch expreſſions as theſe, to correct the falſe notions that many Chriſtians entertained of it. Gal. iv. 9. May we not then, without reproach, ſpeak what appears to be the plain truth concerning compoſitions, merely human, without ſubjecting ourſelves to harſh imputations?

I firmly believe that our fathers are worthy of great praiſe, for their contendings againſt the enemies of the Proteſtant religion, and of Preſbyterian principles. I believe that our ſolemn Covenants were bleſſed by God, as a means for the tranſmiſſion of the purity of the truths and ordinances of God to ourſelves. I believe that we are not only ungrateful, but unfaithful to God, if we do not hold faſt their principles. But I believe alſo, that it would be a damnable ſin to profeſs the belief of any thing profeſſed by them, unleſs we find it, upon due examination, to be conformable to Scripture.

To all that has been ſaid in behalf of the alteration propoſed, ſome will think it ſufficient to reply, that by an innovation ſo great and unprecedented, we forfeit the character of Seceders, and ought to take to ourſelves ſome new name.

It is needleſs to ſay much in vindication of our right to the name of Seceders, which has not been generally conſidered as an honourable appellation. We are not however aſhamed of it. If it is a reproach to be called Seceders, we conſider it as the reproach of Chriſt. Beſides, we are not willing to lay aſide a name which denotes our relation to a ſet of noble church-patriots, who contended to deprivation for the liberties of the church, and for the purity of the doctrine of Chriſt.

We would rather, however, renounce all connection with them, than bind ourſelves implicitly to approve all their ſentiments and every part of their conduct. Were we baptized in their name? Had they not a body of death within them, whilſt they lived in this world? Were their underſtandings perfectly delivered from the influence of the corrupt principle, any more than their hearts? They certainly erred in practice every day of their life, Pſal. xix. 10.; and who will ſay that they might not err in judgment? Will a man be refuſed the appellation of a Lutheran, becauſe he will not call the epiſtle of James an epiſtle of ſtraw? or the name of a Calviniſt, becauſe he believes the moral obligation of the fourth commandment, as well as of the third? Did our fathers at the Reformation dream, that they forfeited all right to claim a connection with the Church of Geneva, becauſe they would not obſerve Chriſtmas and Eaſter? There are already too many diſtinctive names for different claſſes of Chriſtians. A thouſand more muſt be ſpeedily invented, if every difference and every change of opinion render a new name neceſſary.

But were our fathers in the Seceſſion really ſo remote from that way of thinking, which, in our apprehenſion, renders the change neceſſary, as our opponents ſuppoſe? Let us hear what they ſay, in an act of the ſupreme court, concerning the power of civil magiſtrates: "As "the whole inſtitution and end of their office, are cut "out by, and lie within the compaſs of natural princi- "ples, it were abſurd to ſuppoſe that there could or "ought to be any exerciſe thereof towards its end, in "the foreſaid circumſtances, but what can be argued "for and defended from natural principles."

What is the preciſe meaning of theſe words, in an act of our ſupreme court long ſince [1744] publiſhed to the world, I will not ſay. If they have any meaning at all, they are ſurely inconſiſtent with the doctrine, that "he, "the civil magiſtrate, hath authority, and it is his duty "to take order, that unity and peace be preſerved in "the church, that the truth be kept pure and entire, "that all blaſphemies and hereſies be ſuppreſſed."—— That "he hath power to call Synods, to be preſent at

" them, and to provide that whatſoever is tranſacted in " them be agreeable to the mind of God."

Theſe laſt words put me in mind of a decree of the famous council of Chalcedon, in which, after the venerable fathers had repreſented the diſorderly conduct of the favourers of the Eutychian hereſy, they proceed in theſe words: "It ſeems juſt to us, according to the will of God, if " it ſhall pleaſe our moſt divine Lord the Emperor, that " Dioſcorus, the moſt reverend biſhop of Alexandria, Ju- " venal, the moſt reverend biſhop of Jeruſalem, Thalaſſi- " us, the moſt reverend biſhop of the Cappadocian Ce- " ſarea, and Euſebius, the moſt reverend biſhop of An- " cyra, ſhould by this Synod be deprived, according to " the canons, of the Epiſcopal dignity." I am perſuaded our fathers would by no means have approved of ſuch a form of language in eccleſiaſtical proceedings. I believe they were as zealous as we are, and gave better proofs than we have ever done, of this zeal for liberty of conſcience, and the independency of the church on the ſtate.

It will not, I think, be alleged, that our Confeſſion of Faith, however cordially approved by them, gives ſuch a good evidence of the judgment of the firſt Seceders about this point, as their own expreſs words. Should any of us prepare a diſcourſe, on any ſubject, to give the world information of our judgment concerning it, all men would conſider it as a juſt ſtatement of our judgment on the ſubject; although it may be found ſcarcely reconcileable, in every particular, with what is ſaid in a book of conſiderable bulk, that was owned by us as our creed. Should men's judgment on any point of religion be eſtimated rather from their known creeds than from their own words, who could be convicted of error, if he did not chuſe to diſavow the received ſtandards of doctrine? Socinians themſelves might be reputed ſound in the faith of Chriſt's Deity, if men's principles are to be learned from the books to which they declare their aſſent, rather than from their own words.

I will not ſay that there are no paſſages in the books, or even in the public deeds of the firſt Seceders, from which it may not be juſtly inferred, that they allowed the civil magiſtrate much power in church-affairs. But

they may have much power of this kind, without poſſeſſing all that power which is given them, in the paſſages now called in queſtion. All that I infer from the paſſages above quoted is, that they do not appear to have been ſtedfaſt to the end of their lives in believing that the civil magiſtrate was empowered, or under obligation to repreſs hereſy and ſchiſm, or to provide that what was tranſacted in church-courts, ſhould be agreeable to the mind of God. If thus much is allowed, and I ſee not how it can be denied, is it to be thought, that they would not have paſſed an act to the ſame purpoſe with that which we now propoſe, if they had adverted to the neceſſity of it? They were not men that would have willingly impoſed articles of faith upon others, which were not matters of faith to themſelves. Would they have ſtill continued to put the uſual queſtions to candidates for the miniſtry or elderſhip, if they had ſuppoſed that there was ſomething in one of them not agreeable to the mind of Chriſt? Could any dread of the bad conſequences of innovation have induced them to do a deliberate ſolemn action, that was not in their eyes perfectly conſiſtent with uprightneſs? No man that knew them will ſay ſo. Of thoſe who ſlanderouſly report concerning good men, that they will do evil that good may come, the damnation is juſt.

It will ſtill be ſaid, that no true Seceder will object to the terms of communion fixed by the firſt Seceders, eſpecially thoſe which relate to our ſolemn Covenants. But was the late Mr Brown of Haddington no true Seceder? Was he not, in the judgment of all good men who knew him, a bright ornament to the Seceſſion? Read, however, his Hiſtory of the Seceſſion, and you will find, that more than once he finds fault with their deeds about terms of communion. Read what he ſays in particular, concerning that act of the Aſſociate Preſbytery which appoints the ſwearing of our covenants to be a term of communion. Mr Brown not only expreſſes his diſſatisfaction with it, but ſays that, to the beſt of his knowledge, not one of the body ſtrictly obſerved it *.

* "The Preſbytery's act, conſtituting the ſwearing of this Covenant the term of Miniſterial and Chriſtian communion with them, was not a little condemned. It was by many thought quite unrea-

Our fathers, it ſeems, were conſcious that they had carried their zeal for our ſolemn covenants too far, in requiring all their communicants to join in renewing them; and therefore, they did not execute their own deed. Muſt we be charged with apoſtacy, becauſe we aſcribe fallibility to men, in a caſe almoſt the ſame with one wherein they themſelves were ſenſible that they had erred?

It is certain that the miniſters of our perſuaſion have not made the ſwearing of the covenants, in the form enacted, an article either of miniſterial or Chriſtian communion. It is no leſs certain that they have made, what is at leaſt equivalent to the ſwearing of them in another form, a term of miniſterial communion, and that many of them have made it a term of Chriſtian communion.

I ſhould be glad to know, whether it may be juſtly eſteemed leſs difficult for a man of a tender conſcience to declare in a ſolemn vow that he believes the binding obligation of the covenants of our fathers, than to join perſonally in a public renovation of them. I cannot well ſee why our Synod has not executed the above mentioned act, as far as miniſters or elders were concerned, unleſs they believed ſo. But on what ground did they believe ſo? Did they think the obligation laid on us by the act of our fathers in ſwearing, not the ſame as if we ourſelves had ſworn the covenants in our own perſons? If they thought ſo, what was the difference more than a verbal one, between their ſentiments, and the ſentiments of our preſent ſcruplers? But here, I confeſs, I am at a loſs to account for their conduct, and for our own, unleſs from ſome degree of inattention to what ſurely ought not to

ſonable, that a perſon, zealouſly attached to divine truth, nay to our ſubordinate ſtandards and covenants, and of eminently holy practice, ſhould be excluded from church-fellowſhip with them, merely becauſe he could not underſtand the meaning or certainty of every thing in this bond and acknowledgment of ſins; or, would not confeſs or ſwear to God what he underſtood not. Not a few of the Seceding miniſters were afterwards ſenſible of the ſinfulneſs of this act; nor do I know, that ever the moſt zealous for covenanting did, with reſpect to the admiſſion of their people to ſealing ordinances, act up to the tenor of it." Brown's Hiſt. of the Seceſſion, page 53. edit. 6.

have been done without the deepeſt conſideration. We ſurely cannot impute to our fathers a principle ſo diſhonourable to their names, as the ſuppoſition that they aſcribed greater and leſs degrees of binding obligation to ſolemn oaths. But this, I think, I may ſay without offence, that if our fathers had any good reaſon for receding from the act reſpecting the renovation of the covenants as an article of communion, the ſame reaſon ought to be held a ſufficient one for receding from that act which impoſes the vow which includes a recognition of their binding obligation as a term of communion. Let us not condemn ourſelves in that which we allow, nor allow ourſelves in any thing equivalent to that which we condemn.

I may obſerve farther, that our fathers, according to the account given by Mr Brown, receded from the forementioned act of the aſſociate Preſbytery, without repealing it. It ſeems they did not reckon it, in all caſes, inconſiſtent with their principles to act, as individuals or in inferior judicatories, in direct oppoſition to acts of the ſupreme court. I do not ſay that they did right, or that they did wrong, in doing ſo. I mention it for the ſake of thoſe who can ſcarcely acknowledge, that any thing which was done by our fathers is unworthy of imitation by us; and yet cannot bear that, in any caſe, our inferior courts ſhould grant indulgences not authorized by the Synod.

Why do you thus, ſome will ſay, endeavour to find inconſiſtencies in the conduct of your venerable fathers, men with whom you are not worthy to be compared? I willingly confeſs that I am not worthy to be compared with them, and I deny that I have found any greater faults in their conduct, than have been uſually found in the conduct of the beſt and wiſeſt men in all ages, eſpecially when they were placed in difficult ſituations. I believe there is no man living, in whoſe opinions and practices inconſiſtences would not be found, if they were all laid open to the world.

But I have the following apologies to make for the freedom I have uſed with men for whom I have always entertained, and will ever entertain, an high veneration.

First, Uprightneſs requires us to be no leſs ready to acknowledge, when occaſion demands it, the faults of the particular bodies of men with which we are connected, than our own perſonal faults. And I am perſuaded that our church-diviſions will never be healed, till this law of integrity is better obſerved by the various parties into which the lovers of the goſpel are unhappily ſplit.

Secondly, If I am become a fool in ſpeaking of the imperfections of our fathers, and of our own, for I do not pretend to juſtify ourſelves in following their example, I am compelled to do it by thoſe members of our body who ſeem to think that the ſentiments of our fathers ought to have the ſame influence on our judgments as a text from the acts of the Apoſtles.

I do not ſay, that they did not walk uprightly, according to the truth of the goſpel; and yet who will blame Paul for ſaying ſo, on a certain occaſion, concerning Peter? All that I ſay is, that they did not, on a certain occaſion, according to my apprehenſion, carry their own principles of action to the proper extent. They were men of conſcience, and acted according to the perſuaſion of their own minds, and are now, I believe, in heaven. But if I ſhould act as they did, without the ſame perſuaſion in my own mind, I cannot hope to be admitted to their bleſſed ſociety; for the Apoſtle ſays, "He that doubteth is damned if he eat, becauſe "he eateth not of faith, and whatſoever is not of faith "is ſin."

Every man muſt be fully perſuaded in his own mind. Every man muſt prove his own work. By following this rule, we walk in the footſteps of the flock, and follow them who now inherit the promiſes.

God grant, that all of us may be enabled to love the truth and the peace, to follow after the things that make for peace, and the things whereby one may edify another.

THE END.

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